The Washington Monthly

SEPTEMBER 1993/$3.95

- James Fallows on the Bush White House follies
- Louis Rukeyser and the corporate takeover of PBS
- The low tar cigarette sham

"You're not going to feel a thing."

The Monthly offers a second opinion

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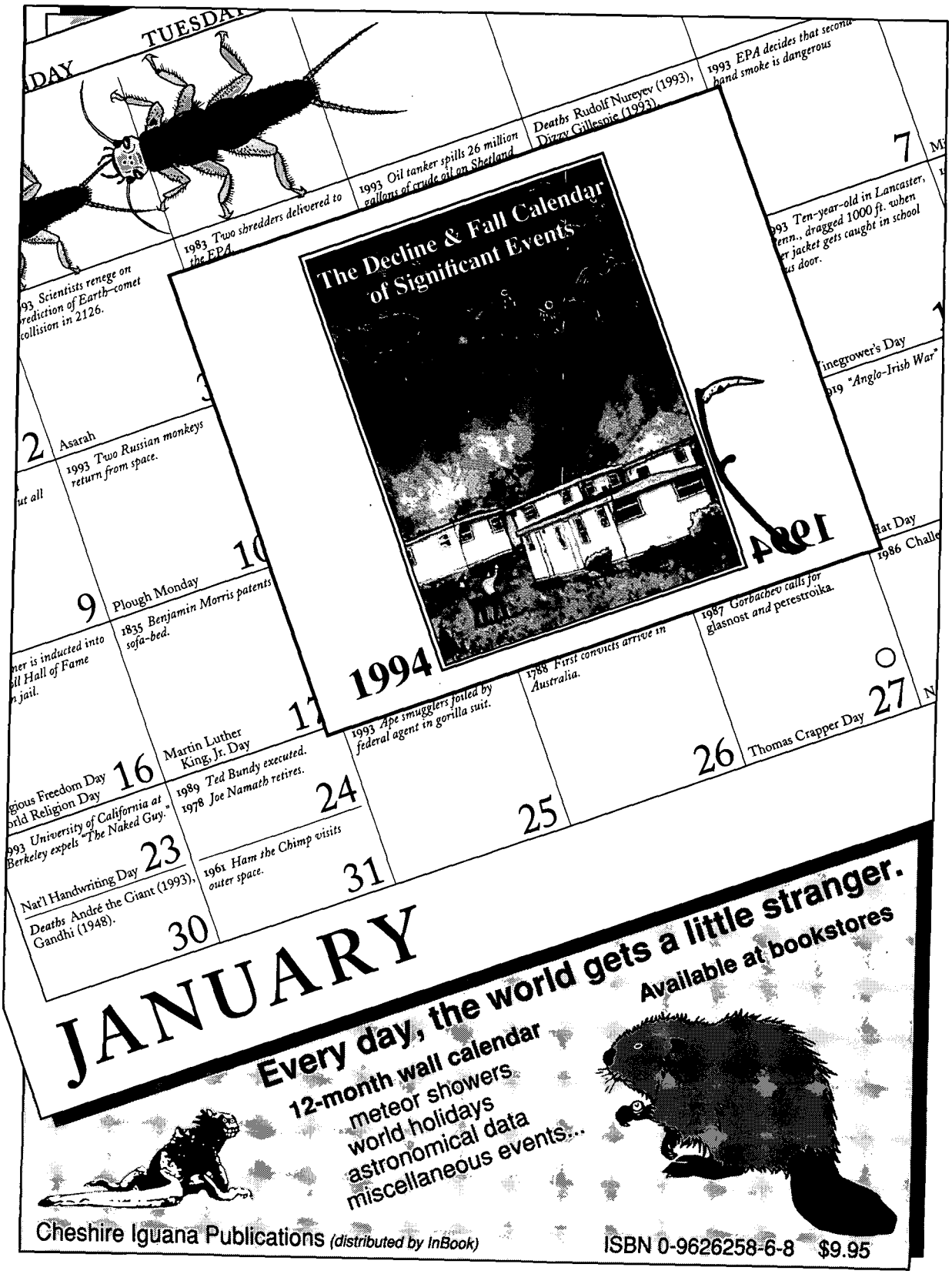

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The Washington Monthly

Volume Twenty-Five, Number Nine September 1993

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LETTERS

Coked up

I was, of course, pleased with John Shelton Reed's review ["Cokelore," June] of my new book, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola*. I am writing only to correct an error which slipped through in the galley proofs upon which he based his review. Reed wrote: "A $200 share of 1892 stock, with dividends reinvested, would be worth $500 million today." In fact, it was $100 for that 1892 share, and it would be worth—no kidding—$2.5 *billion* today.

MARK PENDERGRAST
Stowe, VT

Press sore

My heartfelt thanks to you for writing the article "The Bad News Bearers" [Christopher Georges, July/August]. I have read it and reread it, taking comfort from the knowledge that I am not alone in thinking that Bill Clinton has been unjustly pilloried by the press.

LUCILE D. GREENWOOD
Sedgwick, ME

The media's treatment of a president may be inversely related to its coverage of the president as a candidate for office. The easier the media is on a presidential candidate during the campaign, the harder it will be once the candidate has become president. Many well-documented studies validate the general disparity in the "favorable" and "unfavorable" coverage given to the major presidential candidates during the 1992 primary and general elections. A recent study of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*, by Emily Bach at the University of California, Irvine, shows that 75 percent of the coverage received by Bush in these three news weeklies was negative, whereas 60 percent of Clinton's and 49 percent of Perot's was positive. The "mugging" of President Clinton during his first four months in office illustrates the possibility of this hypothesis. Conversely, harsher treatment by the media of a presidential candidate may precipitate a much longer honeymoon with the media for the new president. What we've yet to understand is why the media may overreact, positively or negatively, as Georges shows it has with Bill Clinton.

MARK P. PETRACCA
Professor of political science, University of California
Irvine, CA

Gray natter

While Jon Meacham ["Myth Information," July/August] is intent on seeing that affluent senior citizens' Social Security gets taxed, he forgets that such a program is on a slippery slope that will eventually end up as welfare for lower income people. While the new law will tax 85 percent of the benefits, up from 50 percent, that affluent senior citizens receive, the next step will be to tax 100 percent. Future steps will be to take away Social Security from more and more people in the upper middle class, eventually making it only for lower middle class and lower income citizens.

Mr. Meacham also omits that many affluent seniors land way behind the eightball on Social Security while super-wealthy younger people pay at lower tax rates. As a person who worked between ages 65 and 70, I did not receive the over $20,000 per year that I would have had I stopped working. That saved the Social Security system $100,000-plus. In addition, I and the company I work for paid about $7,500 per year for five years' Social Security. Since I will continue to work after age 70, the net result will be that I will receive less than $700 per year in Social Security as long as I continue to work.

JERRY STEINMAN
West Nyack, NY

How D.A.R.E. you

I am writing to express concern and dismay over the recent article, "Just Say Nonsense" [Jeff Elliot, May]. While I wholeheartedly support the thesis that drug prevention programs need to be held accountable, I have grave concerns about factual inaccuracies and oversights in this piece relative to D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) specifically and drug prevention programs in general.

A recent Gallup survey of D.A.R.E. graduates in all 50 states conducted just last month shows over 90 percent of students indicated that D.A.R.E. has helped them avoid drugs and alcohol. I believe we owe it to our kids to work together to develop programs that meet their very real needs.

GLENN A. LEVANT
Executive director Worldwide, D.A.R.E.
Los Angeles,CA

The author replies:

Since Mr. Levant offers no specific instances of "factual inaccuracies and oversights," I can only point out that success in drug prevention programs is proven in longitudinal studies, not one-shot deals taken immediately after a program. Without this kind of research, you cannot truthfully claim that a program produces meaningful reductions in the use of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol by children, which was the point of my argument.

Plante's punch

Reporter Dan Cogan ["More Champagne, Ms. Mitchell?" July/August] didn't do his homework.

Cogan suggests that the press uproar over the firing of the seven-person White House travel office was the whining of reporters with a vested interest in the people who enable them to lead a life of luxury on the road. It never seems to

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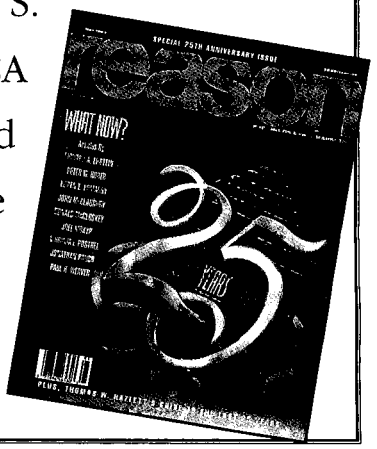

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occur to him that journalists might be upset that seven people who did their jobs well were summarily dismissed without any kind of due process, their reputations anonymously tarnished by White House staff members whispering allegations of criminal wrongdoing.

As the White House report on the incident clearly showed, White House staff members who argued for the dismissal of the travel staffers had myriad ulterior motives. This was apparent during the uproar which followed the dismissal—and a further reason for the reporters' outrage.

The travel office—contrary to Cogan's assertion—does not exist solely to feed and care for the press. It also arranges travel for the Executive Office of the President.

On presidential trips, the first priority of the travel office is not the press, but the White House staff traveling with the President. Press baggage is indeed dropped in one's hotel room by the porter, for a porter's fee tacked onto the bill.

About those "first class hotel suites": For reporters and all but the highest-level White House staffers, they are ordinary single rooms (often in *very* ordinary hotels) at a rate negotiated by the travel office—always substantially less than the posted, or "rack," rate. Ground transportation pre-arranged? Of course. By bus. How else to move staff and press from event to event to cover the President?

Laundry and dry cleaning "taken care of"? How silly! The only thing the travel office ever did about reporters' dirty laundry was convince a hotel to take it in and return it during a five or six hour overnight turnaround.

And how about the charge that the travel office helped reporters evade customs duties—whisking their baggage "past customs agents"? On overseas trips, a U.S. Customs officer always travels on the press plane. Customs forms are handed out, and just as on regular international flights, the declaration is each person's responsibility. The Customs officer on board has the same authority to question the declaration as he or she would have if the traveler was passing through the "Nothing to Declare" lane at a commercial airport.

Now—to the real point. Just whose money is being spent for all of the amenities discussed above? Mr. Cogan never tells us—but it's all paid by news organizations: the press plane, the ground transportation, the filing room, the reporters' hotel rooms—yes, even their laundry.

Cogan does raise some good questions. Does the retinue of reporters following the President make journalistic sense? Do the pay and perks of Washington reporters alter our perspective? But if he's going to make those arguments, he should first get his facts straight.

BILL PLANTE
White House correspondent, CBS News
Washington, D.C.

The author replies:

My point is that in their stories about the firings, White House reporters repeatedly failed to explain the stake they had in the existing arrangement. In fact, even after Vincent Foster Jr.'s last note said "The press is covering up the illegal benefits they received from the travel staff," the major media glossed over the allegation so that readers were unclear what Foster was talking about.

About those "ordinary" rooms: During President Bush's trips to Houston, the press corps stayed in the four star Four Seasons Hotel. In Paris, reporters stayed at the equally comfortable Intercontinental. As for baggage, most people don't have the choice of sticking a bellhop tab on a bill that someone else pays.

There *is* a Customs officer on board the press plane, but there seems to be a good deal worked out: Reporters don't declare, and the Customs official doesn't ask. No reporter I spoke to denied that their colleagues have smuggled stuff in from overseas.

It's true that news organizations pay for these perks and more. So reporters, in not writing about $100 flat fares for family members to go along to Santa Barbara or Kennebunkport, aren't swindling taxpayers. They're swindling their bosses, who are charged excessive fares for the reporters in order to subsidize the bargain rates for spouses and kids. But a swindle's a swindle.

The Washington Monthly

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Subscription rates: U.S. and possessions: one year, $35; two years, $66; three years, $92. For Canadian and foreign subscriptions, add $7 for surface delivery; air mail delivery add $32. Back issues, $4.50. Send correspondence concerning subscriptions, undelivered copies, and changes of address to Box 587, Mount Morris IL, 61054. For change of address, please provide six weeks' notice and include old address label. *The Washington Monthly* is indexed in the Book Review Index, Political Science Abstracts, Public Affairs Information Service, the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, the Social Science Index, and Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory and may be obtained on microfilm from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Reprints of articles are available to individuals or schools at $2.00 each (prepaid). For reprint rights for all or part of an article call Carey Jones at (202) 462-0128. Published monthly except combined July/August and January/February issues by The Washington Monthly Company, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009 (202) 462-0128. Printed in U.S.A.
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ISSN 0043-0633. Postmaster: Send change of address to *The Washington Monthly*, Box 587, Mount Morris IL, 61054. Second class postage paid at Mechanicsburg, PA. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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Out of service

That Charlie Peters continues to press for national service is no surprise, but even he should know better than to argue that "it may be the only way we can afford to do what needs doing in health, education" ["Tilting at Windmills," July/August]. National service shifts rather than eliminates costs. Thus, Peters is really arguing that a burden too expensive for the entire society to bear should be borne by *young people alone*. If saving money is the key, perhaps we should conscript postal employees, cops, supermarket clerks, and magazine editors. Think how much money we could save then!

DOUG BANDOW
Senior Fellow, Cato Institute
Washington, D.C.

The editor replies:

I hope the burden will be voluntarily shared by men and women of Doug Bandow's generation, all the people who came of age after service went out of style in the late sixties and who have not performed any service at all, especially those libertarians and conservatives who argue that service should be voluntary but who never seem to volunteer.

Class dissed

I was disgusted when reading Jonathan Schorr's disparaging comments about Teach For America ["Class Action," June] and sickened that anyone reading his article could be misled into believing that Teach For America corps members are as ineffective as he suggests. Like Mr. Schorr, I was also a charter corps member of Teach For America, but unlike Mr. Schorr, I was an outstanding and successful teacher my first year in the under-resourced school where I was placed. I was voted teacher of the year by the veteran faculty of the school where I taught. I aided my students in doubling their standardized test scores. I was able to instill a sense of self-worth within my students that they lacked when I began my year with them.

My list of outstanding accomplishments goes on, but without belaboring my accomplishments, the fact is that I, along with hundreds of other corps members, experienced success with the same training as Mr. Schorr.

JOHN DARBY
Teach For America
New York, NY

The author replies:

I am sorry that Mr. Darby misunderstands the intention of my piece, which concludes that "there is much to work with" in TFA. Bringing energetic, well-educated young people into teaching is a good idea. However, the fact that fully one-third of the corps quit teaching before completing their two-year commitment suggests that my experience was not unique and that corps members could be better prepared.

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Nora Pouillon, Chef/Owner
Restaurant Nora, City Cafe

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TILTING AT WINDMILLS

The American Medical Association is distributing leaflets in its members' waiting rooms that ask "Is the Clinton proposal for health reform good for you and your family? You need to think about these 10 questions." Heading the list is "Will I be able to see my own doctor?" My guess is that this will prove to be an effective tactic.

Clinton could have avoided the problem by adopting the Canadian plan which, of course, lets patients choose their own doctor. Ironically, the insurance companies, the fear of whose wrath apparently led the Clintons not to go for the Canadian plan, are also now planning to use the "you can't choose your own doctor" argument against the very plan the Clinton administration adopted to avoid making them angry.

The AMA used another clever lobbying ploy when it hosted a three-day weekend at the Greenbrier for congressional staffers who will help shape the health legislation. "Interest groups often use posh getaways to woo senators and representatives, but," points out *The Wall Street Journal*'s Timothy Noah, "the lavishness of the Greenbrier [minimum rate $425 per night] as a setting to court congressional staff is extravagant even by Washington's somewhat jaded standards. Its use in this case points up not only congressional staffers' importance in affecting legislation, but also the enormous stakes in the coming health-care debate."

It appears that the lobbies against health care reform are covering every base. They've even hired Paul Tsongas, the man who gave Clinton the most trouble in last year's Democratic primaries. The opposition is so strong that the only hope I see for the cause of reform is for the media to do a good enough job reporting the case for change to balance the propaganda that will flow from the AMA and the insurance and pharmaceutical companies. And the chances that the media will do that are slim indeed. [See "Dead On Arrival," by Tom Hamburger and Ted Marmor, in this issue.] . . .

If you want to see the tip of a federal iceberg, consider the U.S. Embassy in Grenada. For three American employees, there are six cars, six blenders, nine toasters, 29 tables, and 49 chairs. Multiply that by all the military and diplomatic posts we maintain abroad and you get some idea of how the U.S. Treasury might benefit by putting in a call to Sonny's Surplus. . . .

And if you want to get an idea of the efficiency with which all these posts operate, consider the case of Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman, the Muslim cleric with the predisposition for befriending people who like to plant explosive devices in public places. To begin with, the State Department failed to add his name to its suspected terrorist list for seven years after his proclivities had been clearly manifested. Even after his name was added to the list, the Sheik made seven applications for visas, only one of which was rejected on security grounds. On that occasion, the State Department did notify the INS, but the INS failed to catch Rahman either entering or leaving the country. He received at least two other visas to the United States after his name was on both the State Department and INS lists. Finally, while the INS office in New York was trying to deport the Sheik, another INS office in New Jersey was giving him permanent residence status

Incidentally, on all six occasions when the U.S. consulates failed to spot the Sheik on the terrorist list,

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the culprit was a CIA undercover agent. . . .

Another classic tale of government comes from Chicago where it seems that, hours before Mayor Richard Daley was to escort Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala on a tour of the Ida B. Wells housing development, crews arrived to clean the streets and spray silver paint on the rusty fences. A van that offers free immunization was rerouted so it could offer a backdrop to TV cameras. Colorful balloons and a trampoline were provided to attract children and bring appropriate smiles to their faces. Cops were there to keep the gang members away.

"We're not stupid," one mother from the project told John Kass of the *Chicago Tribune*. "Once Daley and that lady from Washington go, the gangbanging will start again. But they won't be here to see that. They'll be in their own homes, watching themselves on TV.". . .

Richard Reeves' unsparing but fair new book on JFK's presidency reminds me that even though this government is all too often the depressing joke that the foregoing items have portrayed, it can do great things—from the NASA of the sixties to Robert Kennedy's Justice Department to the Peace Corps I was privileged to be part of. Earlier in my lifetime, during the Roosevelt administration, such agencies as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the wartime Office of Price Administration provided shining examples of effective government. And of course, the post office, at least through the thirties, forties, and fifties, demonstrated that government could provide an essential service efficiently and effectively. So government can do the job but, as the sad stories that begin this column and the subsequent decline of some of the agencies I've just described illustrate, it won't work if we don't mind the store. We have to make sure that it attracts the kind of workers that came to Washington under the New Deal and the New Frontier and that it has the kind of accountability it had when your postmaster knew he could be fired if you didn't get your mail on time. . . .

Last August a 24 year old man from Rockville, Maryland, was killed by a reckless driver who was going 60 miles per hour in a 45 miles per hour zone and sheared off the side of the victim's car. The driver was an alcoholic who had previously been cited 12 times for speeding and had had his license revoked five times in Massachusetts. Yet he was allowed to drive in Maryland.

We see the same problem in medicine. Repeatedly, doctors

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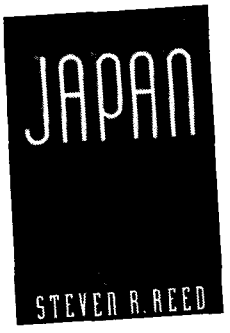

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whose licenses have been revoked in one state are permitted to practice in another. Don't these facts begin to make you suspect the current system of licensing that permits highway drunks and operating room butchers to move from state to state with impunity? Why not have national licensing? . . . .

Further evidence of Clinton's terrible slowness on appointments comes from the Congressional Research Service, which found that by July 4 of his first year John Kennedy had filled 93 percent of the top Pentagon posts, and Jimmy Carter had named 76 percent. Clinton's score is a miserable 33 percent. . . .

One reason the Clinton economic plan had a rough time in Congress is that it was consistently described in media leads as raising taxes. That the increase in income tax would fall solely on the affluent was usually mentioned far lower in the story, which on television often means not at all. The cover of the August issue of *Money* magazine, for example, supplied the Republicans with this slogan: "Beat the Biggest Tax Hike Ever." Although *The New York Times* later revealed "the biggest ever" was a lie, it was a lie that gave Bill Clinton fits.

The Wall Street Journal even contended in its Notable & Quotable section that "Support for redistributive economics has never rallied a majority; even in the thirties, polls showed that Franklin Roosevelt's redistribution was not a vote getter."

Doubtless those polls used the same scientific techniques that produced the *Literary Digest* poll that predicted an FDR defeat in 1936.

Actually, after Roosevelt came out in 1935 with a plan to use taxation to secure "a wider distribution of wealth," he won the presidency by a tremendous landslide, sweeping all states but Maine and Vermont.

If there was any American who was even more beloved than FDR during that era it was the comedian Will Rogers. Interestingly, he too wanted to "arrange some way of getting more equal distribution of wealth in the country."

Will Rogers fascinates me for other reasons. He was, at least in his public persona, absolutely innocent of the snobbery we have endured from the fifties on as more and more Americans try to emulate the rich. He was Huck Finn grown up, and that was what the average American aspired to be back then. As one contemporary puts it in Ben Yagoda's fine new biography of Rogers, "Wise in years, young in humor and love of life, shrewd but gentle, he is what most Americans think other Americans are like."

To some extent Henry Fonda and James Stewart were able to carry on his tradition, but since they too have faded away, there is now a danger we will forget that Huck Finn is what we are at our best, and that is a very great loss for this country.

The fact that there are fewer Huck Finns around means that there *is* less support for redistribution economics today. Another factor is that in the thirties, 90 percent of the people were getting the shaft where today the figure is 68 percent. These are the people with family income of under $50,000. But they are still a clear majority and I am convinced they will rally to the cause if Clinton does a better job of explaining and the media does a better job of reporting. The discouraging thing here is that so many of the major media stars are now in the affluent class and are tempted to identify with its interests. For

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example, my old friend Mickey Kaus, who argued in *The End of Equality* that redistribution is a lost cause, just bought a house in Georgetown where he's going to find a lot of folks who agree with him. . . .

Another example of the errors of the media (and politicians as well) are the figures typically cited on the increase in the national debt under Clinton's proposals. Everyone says essentially "it will go up by $1 trillion over five years."

Yet anyone who bothered to look at page 33 of Clinton's April 8 budget knows the news is worse. (And if Republicans and Perot bothered to look, they'd find better ammunition than they already have.) There one finds that the administration proposed adding $1.4 trillion to the national debt over four years. (What's half a trillion between friends?) That's compared to Bush's $1.53 trillion over four years. Anyone who's watched budget forecasts knows this means that with a little bad luck, Clinton will end up being the biggest-borrowing president in history—not a good thing to run on in '96 when you've racked up this debt with broad tax increases and without the fig leaf of divided government.

The reason people get it wrong is that they usually add up the projected annual deficits and think that's the number. Of course, these annual deficits don't represent the increase in the national debt (gross debt—the $4+ trillion number our kids are on the hook for), because they don't include the trust fund borrowing.

Republicans should argue this way—and of course will, when it becomes plainer. What's amazing is that Ross Perot can't get these numbers right. You'd think he could hire someone to look at the budget! David Broder's tough columns critiquing the administration early on for not doing more could have packed that much more punch with the higher number and the argument it permits. The only journalist who's gotten it right is Jonathan Rauch in *The National Journal* in an excellent piece called "Clintonomics—The Sequel."

The point is that such facts are easy to find with simple effort. Journalists should not get it wrong. And Ross and the Republicans would be wise to get it right too, since it will prompt the administration to turn to the needed budget round two earlier when they realize that being the biggest borrowers in history won't look good in '96. . . .

The most novel explanation I have heard of Vincent Foster's suicide comes from *Inside Washington*'s Carl Rowan, who told viewers:

"You get a man who's very close to the president, a confidant, his head is full of our most secret information, and because of the excesses of a John Sununu he can't get a car ride home." In other words the suicide would not have occurred, or, in Rowan's words, "we would at least have some idea of what happened" if only the White House still provided drivers for officials of Foster's rank. This takes me back eleven years ago to a time when I was on this same show and made some anti-perk remarks only to be rebuked off-camera by Elizabeth Drew, who allowed that she liked to be picked up by a limousine and by Rowan, who said he refused to fly unless it was first class.

We all like comfort, but the problem with the Drew-Rowan attitude among journalists is that they let their own taste for luxury encourage Washington officials to insulate themselves from the problems of the rest of us, like having to take the bus or subway or hail a cab at rush hour—finding generous health insurance, not coincidentally, is a cinch if you work for the White House, Congress, or the major media . . .

A Johns Hopkins study of depression in 104 different professions found the highest proportion of victims was among lawyers. This is one reason why I

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am constantly warning young people not to go into the law unless they truly feel a real calling, or enjoy actual practice. If such tests were strictly applied by all lawyers, the ranks of the profession would be instantly cut by at least two-thirds.

According to Amiram Elwork, the coauthor of a recent research study "Lawyers in Distress," a very large proportion of lawyers "are either very dissatisfied with their careers, suffer from some form of mental illness, or have been problem drinkers. Today's lawyers work in conditions that are remarkably similar to the 'sweat shops' blue collar workers endured several generations ago. Such law firms push productivity to the limit of human capacity and constantly function in a crisis mode."

The result, Elwork told *The Washington Times*, is that "mental illness and substance abuse are leading causes of malpractice suits and ethical disciplinary actions against attorneys."

In the fifties, I was fortunate enough to work in a small firm in a small city with some non-workaholic partners and a variety of clients who represented a cross-section of the community and its problems. But I still found that half the work was either boring—imagine what researching a land title is like—or even when interesting, as in trying cases, was often for causes of marginal merit. I was much happier in public service in the state legislature of West Virginia and with the federal government here in Washington, work that I have tried to continue with this magazine.

Of course, there are a few lawyers who love their work and make a valuable contribution to society. But most would be happier doing something else. Not only would they be better off but so would the rest of society because many of the unhappy lawyers are bright and able people who could do great good in other kinds of work. . . .

Did you happen to see the story in *The New York Times* about the third-year medical student who after working his 15th straight hour fell asleep at the wheel and was crushed to death in an accident caused by his driving the wrong way on an exit ramp? The abuse of medical students, interns, and residents is even worse than that which young lawyers have to endure.

There are two reasons: (1) Older doctors want their youthful brethren to endure the same hardships they did, and (2) Hospitals profit from having slave labor. There is a simple solution: Have older doctors with hospital privileges do night duty just a couple of times a year for modest pay. There are enough senior doctors—meaning those past residency—to free the young from the ghastly burden they have today. . . .

We have often tried to explain that, although court dockets may be overcrowded, American judges have displayed a remarkable ability to keep their own work schedules on what might be charitably called the light side. Consider that the United States Supreme Court Justices have to be there for the approximately 40 days set aside for oral arguments and the roughly 30 Friday mornings on which they meet to discuss cases. That leaves the justices 295 days to schedule as they please. Justice Scalia chose to use the freedom by taking 20 trips in 1992 alone. Among his destinations, according to Linda Greenhouse of *The New York Times*, were Venice, Innsbruck, Oslo, and Genoa.

Incidentally, each trip was financed by a non-profit institution, which may help explain why the law is so tender in its treatment of these organizations, letting them get away with the kind of abuses that recently have been reported about one Blue Cross chapter after another. . . .

In hindsight, it seems clear to me that we should have provided enough military aid to the Bosnian Muslims to give them a fair chance against the Serbs. Cyrus Vance and David Owen were guilty of grave error last year when they counseled against such aid on the grounds that it would keep the Bosnians away from the peace table. It was the lack of such aid that kept the Serbs away from the table. They knew they could win more by their unfair military advantage than they could through serious negotiations. The only time they showed a sign of reasonableness was in March when Clinton threatened them with both air strikes and aid to Bosnia. They were falling all over themselves in their rush to the peace table until our NATO partners rejected Clinton's pleas and the Serbs returned to shelling Sarajevo. . . .

Morton Mintz, who I believe will rank as one of the greatest investigative journalists of our time, recently revealed that the ACLU had taken $500,000 from the tobacco companies while the ACLU was publicly arguing, supposedly on the basis of the purest principle, that restrictions on cigarette advertising could violate the First Amendment. The ACLU had not revealed that it was on the take from the merchants of death, a.k.a. tobacco companies, on the grounds—you're going to love this—that it had to protect the companies' right of privacy.

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How could anyone seriously believe that advertising of harmful products is protected by the First Amendment? Obviously the newspapers and magazines that fatten their profits with cigarette advertising have a reason for wanting to cloak their sins under the righteous mantle of free speech. And so do all the lawyers who represent or hope to represent them. When you add all of those lawyers to the lawyers who work for the tobacco conglomerates, you can see that an impressive array of legal talent has a stake in peddling the notion that James Madison really intended to protect R.J.R.'s right to use Joe Camel to lure children to smoke.

If you want to know how wrong these guys are, read *Democracy and the Problem of Free Speech*, a brilliant book by Cass R. Sunstein, professor of Jurisprudence at the University of Chicago Law School, in which he explains why commercial speech should not be accorded the same protection that we should give to political discussion.

Like Alexander Meiklejohn, another great First Amendment theorist, Sunstein believes that political speech is the heart of the First Amendment. It is this liberty that is key to all others and for this reason I have told our advertising people that, although I would not accept any advertising that glamorized smoking, I would reluctantly accept an ad for the Tobacco Institute saying that tobacco companies have the constitutional right to advertise. That would be a political argument that I would not have the right to suppress.

On the other hand, I have taken great pride in refusing to run all ads that attempt to persuade people to smoke. I wish more publications would join me as the *Seattle Times* recently has. Unfortunately most papers and magazines accept, even solicit, cigarette advertising. I can't understand how decent people like the Grahams and Sulzbergers can live with this practice. The *Post*, by the way, ran the Mintz report on page A13, which is just the kind of placement it gave to his many exposés of corporate malfeasance during his long career at the paper. In defense of the *Post*, it did pay Mintz a salary and it did run his stories. But the frequent obscurity of their placement in the paper betrayed a lack of enthusiasm for truth that might offend advertisers. . . .

I am disturbed to learn that 70 percent of the 1,400 national service volunteers who gathered in San Francisco from all across the nation in June turned out to be black. This is a strong indication that what we're going to get from Clinton is not a service but a poverty program. I support programs designed to help needy youth, but they should not be confused with service programs whose purpose is not to give people jobs but to ask them to give of themselves. . . .

The long distance phone companies have learned a great secret of the monopoly game. Even though one company doesn't have exclusive control of the market, the happy result of monopoly can be achieved by unwritten agreements to keep overall prices up while appearing to compete with clever ads that promise dramatic savings—savings that just happen to be unrealizable for the average customer. It usually turns out that you can only save the promised 50 percent if you make a hundred calls to Nome, Alaska, and Anniston, Alabama, every month. . . .

—*Charles Peters*

JOURNAL OF DEMOCRACY

MARC F. PLATTNER AND LARRY DIAMOND, EDITORS

Featured in the July 1993 issue
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Published quarterly in January, April, July, and October. **Annual subscriptions: $24.00, individuals; $48.00, institutions. Single issues: $7.50, individuals; $14.00, institutions.**

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Stocks, Bonds, and Barney

How public television went private

by Eric Konigsberg

In the spring of 1992, as Congress reconsidered the funding of public broadcasting, Bob Dole shared a few choice words. "The liberals love it," he snapped on the floor of the Senate. "They have their own network. . . I have never been more turned off and more fed up with the increasing lack of balance and the unrelenting liberal cheerleading I see and hear on the public airwaves."

Hard to tell which PBS Dole has been watching. The network's handful of headline-grabbing episodes in the past few years has indeed been about documentaries deemed by conservatives too liberal to run. But as with "Tongues Untied," a treatment of black homosexuals, the result in dozens of cases was a speedy retreat in the face of right-wing pressure. (Over 200 of PBS's 351 stations declined to run "Tongues Untied.") Meanwhile, gradually and with less fanfare, a decidedly un-liberal trend has developed: Corporations are underwriting more and more public programming. The results are a proliferation of the kinds of shows that a Republican Minority Leader, and, more frequently, anyone playing the stock market, might just stay home to watch.

PBS has been using its sizable viewership—a 2 to 5 percent share of the Nielsen ratings—to lure companies into sponsoring programs. The network is too poor to fund any shows in toto, but corporate underwriting—up 22 percent in the past year—comes with a variety of built-in catches. Last year, for instance, Texaco pulled its funding from the "Great Performances" series the week before it was to air "The Lost Language of Cranes," a drama about gays. IBM had a near-valiant go at corporate conscientiousness a few years ago and agreed to put up $2 million for a series the Audubon Society had devel-

Eric Konigsberg is a Washington writer.

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oped on environmental hazards, but Big Blue backed away before any episodes could be filmed. Why? Although IBM had a clean enough pollution record, the same could not be said of dozens of its clients. "The Machine That Changed the World," on the other hand, a series about computers, was paid for in part with $1.9 million from Unisys. Turns out Unisys evolved from the company profiled in the series' first episode.

By underwriting public TV, corporate entities can go beyond hawking products to espousing the economic models a corporation, by nature, favors. Corporate interests are more likely to promote management over labor, free manufacturing over regulatory laws, and certain tax policies like investment tax credits and a capital gains tax cut. The business programming on PBS—shows like "Wall $treet Week with Louis Rukeyser," "Adam Smith's Money World," and "The Nightly Business Report"—is subtly anti-labor and anti-tax, undoubtedly due in no small part to the fact that all three of PBS's regular business shows are heavily financed by corporations.

WEEKNIGHTS ON YOUR PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION.

The Nightly Business Report is produced by WPBT2/Miami in association with Reuters.

Nationally underwritten by Digital Equipment Corporation; A.G.Edwards, Inc.; The Franklin Group of Funds and Public Television Stations nationwide.

In a single week's worth of watching "The Nightly Business Report" early this summer, you would have seen, to list but a few examples: guest analyst Beryl Sprinkel suggesting how the rejection of Bill Clinton's stimulus package would achieve Clinton's economic goals of promoting growth and cutting the deficit; Nikko Securities economist Robert Brusca dismissing Clintonomics as "detrimental and in fact hostile to job growth"; and a spot on how government efforts to crack down on money laundering have only served to over-regulate the banking and auto industries.

But over that time, not one defense of Clinton's proposal to raise taxes was given by anyone other than a Clinton official or a congressional Democrat. One program skipped the pros and cons of the issue altogether and was instead devoted entirely to illuminating the loopholes in existing estate tax.

PBS, a few weeks earlier, had aired Adam Smith's lament for the over-regulated drug industry which Smith sympathetically described as "punch-drunk" before intoning: "Pharmaceuticals—this is a high-tech, high-wage industry. It's creating jobs in America. But the drug companies are under

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attack. Their stocks have nosedived. Where's the attack coming from? No, not from the Japanese or the Germans, but Washington."

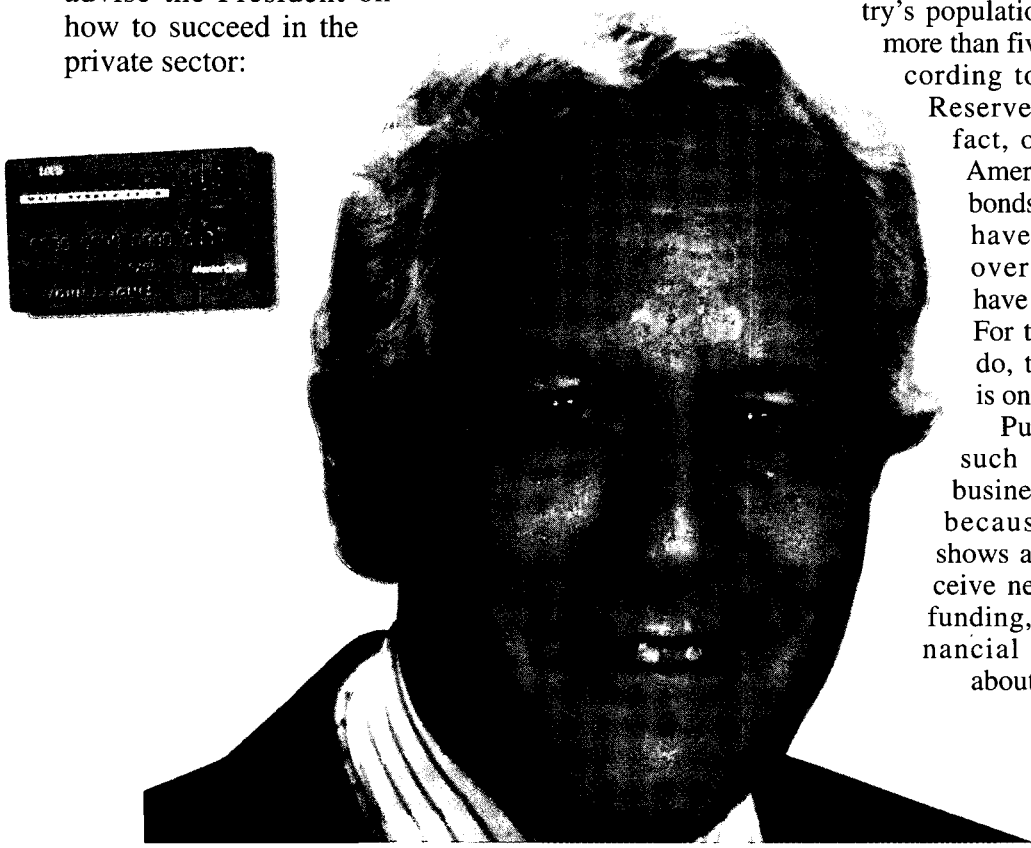
"Wall $treet Week's" host, Louis Rukeyser, peppers his investment advice with watch-your-wallet quips throughout the program. In the same weeks during which the above episodes ran, you could have tuned in to catch references to "our tax-hungry politicians," and "Washington. . . [where] the folks apparently have a thirst for taxing everything from income to output." A reference to *Jurassic Park* led to the jibe that "we have creatures in unions and management who haven't had an original thought in at least 65 million years."

And on June 18 came a 5-minute address to Clinton, pretending to advise the President on how to succeed in the private sector:

Mr. President . . . even though you were, in fact, a hard-working, relatively low earner all the years up to now, the minute you started bringing in the bigger bucks in the private sector, some crazy politician would probably start talking about you as if you had been a permanent member of that hated class, the rich . . . Why, some nutty guy is even likely to start taking potshots at you as one of those who had some kind of obscene party in the eighties when the rest of the country supposedly suffered and who therefore needs to be hit with every kind of punitive new tax they can think of. Plus 10 percent.

Of course, nobody watching a show on how to invest money wants to be told to pay more taxes. Still, public television evidences a less than populist conceit by running three such programs, what with only 2 percent of the country's population trading a stock more than five times a year, according to a 1986 Federal Reserve Board study. In fact, only 4 percent of American families own bonds, a mere 3 percent have trusts, and well over half don't even have a savings account. For the 43 percent that do, the average worth is only $1,500.

Public television is such a willing host to business TV, of course, because the business shows are cheap; they receive near-total corporate funding, usually from financial firms. But what about programs geared



The man and his credit card: Pledge to PBS the Louis Rukeyser way.

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toward the workforce? There's nothing at the national level right now, save one show, "We Do the Work," a magazine series about laborers, and it airs on only 40 stations nationwide. A City University of New York study completed in 1989 found that nine times the amount of PBS programming focused on the upper classes than "addressed the lives and concerns of workers as workers."

It's not because labor's allies aren't trying. In 1980, when labor unions offered to provide seed money for "Made in USA," a series about working people's history—not about labor unions—PBS told union representatives their sponsorship constituted a conflict of interest and would be grounds for not airing the shows. Asked how the situation differed from that of "Wall $treet Week"—funded at the time by Prudential-Bache—PBS's then-president Larry Grossman told *The New York Times*: "There's a difference between an underwriter with a general interest in the program's subject and one with a specific interest in it." In other words, a financial company has a general interest in finance, but a labor union has a specific interest in labor. Hmmmm.

PBS eventually conceded to the union, but not without limiting labor contributions to .3 percent of the series' projected budget. So where to go for the money? "It's pretty near impossible to get a corporation to underwrite a labor program," says Gordon Quinn, an award-winning producer who has peddled several ideas for labor-oriented shows, "and going straight to PBS for money is sort of a hopeless cause. The answer you usually get is, 'We already did something on labor this year.'"

Perhaps PBS doesn't see any value in pumping money into something so downmarket as labor unions. "Our demographic is higher-income than any of the commercial networks," boasts PBS corporate spokesman Stu Kantor.

Not by much, it turns out—22.2 percent of public-TV households earned $60,000 a year or more, compared to the 19.3 percent of the overall-TV market. Still, it's an image PBS is intent on cultivating. Jan Wilson, director of corporate support for PBS, wrote an article last winter in *The Advertiser*, a trade magazine put out by the Association of National Advertisers, entitled "Public Television: How it Can Fit Into Your Marketing Plan." She wrote that she was able to convince Lexus to underwrite the series "Travels" because "it knew its principal market would be people who are affluent, sophisticated, and active." "Masterpiece Theater" was actually the brainchild of the Mobil p.r. chief Herb Schmerz, who set out to create the series as an advertising forum for his company. It was underwriting like this that earned PBS the tag "Petroleum Broadcasting Service." The Schmerz legacy lives on in the form of those 30-second "underwriter-ID spots" which made an end run around PBS's "no advertising" rule and now punctuate most programs.

PBS isn't entirely to blame for this corporate invasion. "It was a matter of survival," admits John Wicklein, a former administrator of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Indeed, when a public-sector organization gets less than one-fifth of its budget from Congress, the odds are strong that it'll have to cozy up to corporate America. So is complete congressional appropriation the answer? No, because that would leave PBS hostage to the very government good journalism is supposed to monitor. As it stands, public television has more than once been held to this constraint. Remember "The Lawmakers"? In 1982, the series profiling members of Congress was nearly pulled from scheduling because of its slavishness. But the members themselves, particularly Tip O'Neill and Stephen Solarz, lobbied the Corporaton for Public Broadcasting to keep the show on the air.

What's needed is a trust fund, untouchable by Congress or any presidential administration. The money could come from taxing American households for each television set in use (à la the British system), or charging local broadcasting stations for their use of the airwaves, in effect collecting the licensing fee that has forever been waived by Congress, but which could raise as much as $1 billion a year. Both ideas have been kicking around Washington for years, but to no avail. "There's not one member of Congress who sees public broadcasting as a cause within his or her own constituency," says Jack Willis, the station director of Minneapolis's public station, KTCA, and a former PBS executive. "So there's nobody on our side." But by counting more and more on big money, public television remains wedded to a remarkably narrow, upper-middle class market. And there's nothing very "public" about that. □

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What Al Gore Might Learn the Hard Way

Government has been reinvented before. Here's why it didn't work

by Jon Meacham

It's early afternoon in the White House Briefing Room. Still fresh to power, the new President and his men stand in front of the famous dark blue curtains to kick off a major new initiative: reinventing the federal government.

"We must give top priority to a drastic and thorough revision of the federal bureaucracy, to its budgeting system, and to the procedures for constantly analyzing the effectiveness of its many varied services," the President had said during last year's campaign. ". . . This is no job for the fainthearted. It will be met with violent opposition from those who now enjoy a special privilege, those who prefer to work in the dark, or those whose private fiefdoms are threatened."

Hopes are high. "Today, we have submitted to the Congress the first in a series of recommendations for reorganizing the executive branch of Government," the President says confidently, promising a 300-person review of the government's operations.

The afternoon? July 15, 1977. The President? Jimmy Carter. Thin the ties, shrink the lapels, trim the sideburns and fast forward to 1993: After a generation of bright federal moments like the $500 billion S & L collapse, this snippet of Carter and Bert Lance has all the trappings of Bill Clinton and Al Gore's September kickoff to . . . reinvent the federal government.

We've been here before. Within the last 30 years, LBJ ordered Robert McNamara's Programming-Planning-and-Budgeting Systems instituted government-wide. Nixon had Management by Objectives. Reagan brought in the Grace Commission. And Bush encouraged Total Quality Management. The result? Republicans—and Perot—still score points bashing government, and 80 percent of the public believes that the "country needs to make major changes in the way government works," according to a 1993 *Washington Post*/ABC News poll.

Now comes Gore's National Performance Review (NPR) to remake government. Despite the jargon ("It's time we had a new customer service contract with the American people"), Gore is campaigning against end-of-the-fiscal-year spending sprees, has got religion on cutting the bureaucracy, and is intent on simplifying the Byzantine, 450-level job classification system. But the forces that have killed reform in Washington since the days before Sherman Adams grew fond of vicuna coats are lying in wait. Ah, says the Gore team, this time will be different. Why? Because "one of the major thrusts of what we're doing is measuring and controlling results, not inputs," says Bob Stone, the Pentagon reformer who's directing the Gore review. "Too much of the time in government, we spend a lot of money on a problem and think we're fixing it."

This is promising talk, but turning talk to action means compelling bureaucrats and politicians to do what they have ducked in years past: Report, in a real way, what they're really accomplishing. There's much more at stake here than the fate of another presidential commission. If Washington picks the adminstration's pockets on reform, then the core Democratic principle—that we, in John

Research assistance for this article was provided by Spencer Freedman, Maia Garau, Alan Greenblatt, and Jennifer Levitsky.

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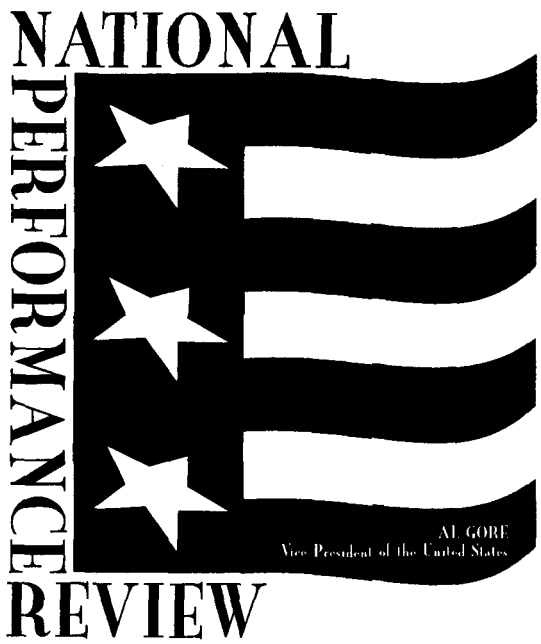
Kennedy's phrase, *can* do better—becomes suspiciously squishy. And Democrats will find it harder and harder to convince voters that they know what they're doing.

When Clinton first announced Gore would lead the NPR in March, the President said, "We'll challenge the basic assumptions of every program, asking does it work, does it provide quality service, does it encourage innovation and reward hard work?" Consider, however, the Carter experience. In the seventies, he deployed zero-based budgeting (ZBB) to force every agency to reevaluate its reason for being. In Carter's ZBB, every federal agency sent three plans to the White House every year, one assuming a 20 percent funding cut. (Carter thought bureaucrats would fess up about what didn't work if faced with declining fortunes.) Agencies complied, but overburdened the system with reams of forms: 10,000 annual "decision packages" poured in from every corner of the federal map. Nobody could even read it all, much less act on it.



"The Carter administration, with the best of intentions," says Ronald Johnson, a budgeting scholar at North Carolina's Research Triangle Institute, "got completely bogged down in forms and spent its time on copious details instead of thinking about the point of a program." The clean-up-the-mess-in-Washington rhetoric died from a thousand paper cuts. But the late seventies weren't bucolic: Energy and jobs and the environment were as bad then as they are now. So why weren't the decision packages eagerly read all over Washington and taken to heart, instead of languishing with Carter? Isn't that logical?

Logic, meet Congress. Congress has locked in three-fourths of the $1.5 trillion budget and oversees line-item spending for everything from the Alaska Natural Gas Transportation System to the Panama Canal Commission. That leaves agencies little power to decide what to spend on their own operations, even on the off-chance bureaucrats admit a program's wasting money.

"Remember, I was sitting at HEW with what was then a $180 billion operation," recalls Joseph Califano, who was Carter's secretary of the old Health, Education and Welfare department. "And I had very little control over where 75 percent of the money went. Education, for instance, was run by a computer, doling out money by congressional formula, and Congress wasn't interested in results as much as they were in getting money appropriated."

Carter failed where Johnson had also failed—and for largely the same reasons. Beginning at the Pentagon in 1961, McNamara deployed a system called PPBS to link dollars to a program's performance. Analysis of cost-effectiveness would referee where federal money would go. LBJ liked the idea and applied it across the board in 1965; by 1971, it was dead, the victim of agencies who treated the analysis as a paperwork burden and a Congress that ignored the analysis and continued to appropriate money for political, not rational, reasons.

To improve their odds, Clinton and Gore speak the language recently repopularized by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler in *Reinventing Government*: Focus on outcomes, not on process. NPR's ultimate credibility hangs on just that: How much can the government deliver? And the only way to find out whether the government is delivering is to evaluate what programs do. Two laws—the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990 and the Governmental

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Performance and Results Act of 1993—now authorize agencies to set goals and measure progress. But neither mandate that budgets be tied to reaching those goals. Here's an old con to watch out for: Bureaucrats love forms (remember ZBB) and counting stuff, because both take time. There's a world of difference, though, between counting how many grants the Department of Transportation processes, for example, and figuring out whether the roads have fewer potholes. And unless the bureaucrats and the Congress buy in (remember PPBS), this could all be a waste of time.

After all, we already count more than the Romans did at the pinnacle of the empire. Today at the Bureau of Labor Statistics, for instance, analysts draw on a 328-page book filled with 2,500 "output" indicators. Two million federal workers in 304 organizations tucked away in 62 agencies undergo the productivity review every year. From the number of cases a Justice Department lawyer handles to the "acres of fine lawn maintained" at American military cemeteries in Italy and Tunisia—and around one monument at Gibraltar—we spend hundreds of millions of dollars a year collecting these minutiae.

Form aid

What use is it all put to? "Damn little," says Allen Schick, professor of public policy at the University of Maryland. "They've got so much data on performance already that they don't know what to do with it."

Consider this: When the General Accounting Office surveyed the 103 big agencies that spent 92 percent of the $1.3 trillion in federal outlays in 1991, 76 of them assured auditors that they gather information on their own programs. Press a little harder: How many of these agencies had clearly defined goals? Sixty-seven. And press again: Thirty-three admitted their information-gathering was not related to achieving those goals. Finally, only nine could straightfacedly say that the information could usefully measure progress. "The federal experience right now is real thin," admits John Mercer, minority counsel to the Senate Governmental Affairs committee. Two examples from the recent past:

- For years at the EPA, inspectors who monitored the injection of hazardous waste into underground water sources reported the number of inspection visits—not the compliance (or noncompliance) the inspections produced. In fact, of the 145 measures that the EPA's Strategic Management and Planning System used in its water oversight, 30 percent were unconnected to any environmental goal—like cleaner water, which was the point of the enterprise. One measure demanded: "Report, by Region and nationally, the number of proposed EPA orders, the number of final EPA. . . administrative orders, and the number of final State [administrative orders] issued." The objective for gathering this data? "None," the GAO found.

- For five years, Congress didn't require two welfare-to-work programs—HHS' JOBS and Agriculture's Food Stamp Employment and Training Act, which spend a combined $700 million a year to train the disadvantaged—to ask what happened to the people they trained. How many get jobs, how many keep them, how much money are they making? Or, if trainees were on welfare coming in, did they stay off? Nobody asked. Instead, the law required managers to calculate "participation rates" and "expenditures by target group." This means Clinton and Gore must make sure that what agencies call "performance measures" aren't largely irrelevant busywork. Why not ask the essential questions, too, by tracking a percentage of people over time?

Because the essential questions are risky. Their answers—such as why the Interior Department spends $66 million irrigating lands for corn, barley, rice, and cotton in the Southwest and the Agriculture Department pays farmers $379 million not to grow crops on that same land—are dangerous to the people who make and carry out those orders. So bureaucrats rightly fear "ending up in the papers or in front of a subcommittee," as one mid-level budget analyst puts it.

That remark underscores two cultural obstacles the NPR must overcome. First, there is something that Gore has come to believe in the last six months: That the more time spent hunting "waste, fraud, and abuse," the less constructive evaluation is actually done. In 1978, Carter established Inspectors General (IG) offices in 33 major departments and agencies with, again, the best of intentions. However, IGs thrive on cops-and-robbers, seizing on petty fraud instead of re-

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porting on what works and what doesn't. That's because Congress, in its wisdom, tied the IGs' own performance to the number of reports generated and the dollars of waste identified. Of course, somebody needs to keep an eye out for corruption, but an inordinate amount of time goes into quick-hit inspections to see whether, say, computer contracting rules are being followed to the letter. Why not evaluate whether the computers the agency bought can do the job?

"The idea behind the IGs was well-intentioned," says Dick Kuserow, a former Health and Human Services inspector general, "but a lot of us became mindlessly adversarial, intimidating our departments instead of thinking about how we could improve what we were doing." And short of an in-House bank, Congress loves nothing better than a good waste, fraud, and abuse hearing to fulminate about wasting the *taxpayers' dollars*. Reagan's Grace Commission, a panel of private sector leaders who came in to identify government waste in the eighties, also talked more about slashing spending—to use budgetspeak—than about smartly spending.

"The problem is, accountability is an all-or-nothing proposition," says one Labor Department evaluator. "Once you agree to it, and tie performance to management and even budgets, you can't dodge responsibility. And that's terrifying to the bureaucratic mind."

The effect of all this? That's the second obstacle. The NPR is confronting an operation where bureaucrats, accustomed to ducking IGs, fear the risk of exposure. In fact, while the Gore plan to empower employees on the front lines by lifting self-imposed regulations sounds wonderful, and the Vice President has run a smart grass-roots campaign to bring bureaucrats into the game, the empowerment plan is based on the shaky assumptions that federal employees who consciously chose security in taking government jobs are chafing to shake up the system. So it is a serious mistake to expect, as most coverage of the NPR has and will, that "Reinvention Labs" and a handful of successful pilots will produce a new government—complete with overhead savings—any time soon.

Take the fate of the great middle management class—236,500 out of a General Schedule workforce of 1.5 million—which has grown from 8 percent of the government in 1955 to 29 percent today. To save real money with his promised 100,000 (or more) job cuts, Clinton must go after the middle ranks, and the unions (to whom Gore has been unusually courteous) say they're all for that. But in the context of the major corporate restructurings of the last decade, to which both Clinton and Gore approvingly refer, even that's remarkably tame: Since 1985, for example, IBM has cut its payroll by 45 percent. The deepest federal cuts, assuming they come at all, would be 5 percent.

Yet no matter how small, the management pruning can't come soon enough if the administration's reinvention ideas are going to work. Let's suppose—just suppose—that Congress lets agencies make spending decisions on the spot. That has happened before, and there's strong evidence that reform isn't long for this world once middle managers get hold of it. Consider one of the more complete federal experiments with a key plank of the NPR: results-oriented budgeting, where agencies are given flexibility to spend money as long as performance targets are met.

In 1985, the U.S. Forest Service approved a handful of pilots to test the idea. Out in Oregon's Ochoco National Forest, rangers streamlined the budget from 27 line items to six, raised productivity by 25 percent, repaired streambeds that had been neglected by Washington budgeters since 1964, and saved $70,000 the first year. The GAO signed off on the experiment, but by 1989, Forest Service managers nervous about losing control of the budgeting—and the reasons for their jobs—withdrew the budgeting power. Ochoco is now back up to 53 line items: "We're worse off than we were before," says Rod Collins, an Ochoco supervisor. "The people who handled the money said we were operating outside the culture, and they couldn't control what we spent money on."

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And this approach is precisely what the administration wants to take national. To counter the inertia that killed the pilots—and could massacre the NPR on a grander scale—we need a well-staffed Office of Management and Budget (OMB) genuinely analyzing programs. But OMB's auditing staff has remained flat for over a generation. In 1955, for a federal budget of $68.4 billion, OMB had 450 staffers. Forty years, eight presidents, a New Frontier, a Great Society, and $1.5 trillion later, OMB has only 550 staffers, only 140 of whom assess what's working. (In contrast, there are *12,000* staffers in the IG offices.) OMB auditors who visit agencies are like tourists dealing with rug merchants abroad for the first time: Uncertain of the local customs and susceptible to built-in price gougings, they only see the final product—in this case, the agency's budget request—and so bargain from weakness. Who knows which division really needs what they're asking for, or where the fat is?

A quantum leap in making sense of government would mix an OMB warring on mediocrity—not waste, fraud, and abuse, but the pedestrian problems of governing—and generating clear reports to give the press the authority and means to criticize government in a way that's now all too rare. The cost is minimal: IGs cost $1.2 billion a year—one half of one percent of the budget. Even doubling that is nothing compared to the $100 billion in federal mismanagement costs the House Budget committee identified in 1991.

Performance smart

So with vigilance and a touch of honesty, things can change. One of the most ambitious pieces of domestic legislation in the eighties, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), offspring of an odd political one-night stand in 1982 between Senators Ted Kennedy and Dan Quayle, is a case study in how to set outcomes, how agencies will try to fool you, and how reform can win out.

The $2 billion program, which reaches two million adults and teenagers, sets clear-cut goals (60 percent of trainees must be working three months after the program ends). If managers fail for two years running, the feds force the local agency to alter its program. It was not always thus. At first, JTPA required its offices just to count *immediate* job placements, which encouraged local administrators to exclude the hard-core unemployed or the homeless. Called "creaming," this hustle of only counting the best let the local operators meet their standards without breaking a sweat. Once the Labor Department caught on to the gimmick, it set the bar higher: Sixty-five percent of the people enrolled must be long-term unemployed or dropouts or homeless.

Why isn't everybody doing this? "The problem is, accountability is an all-or-nothing proposition," says one Labor Department evaluator. "Once you agree to it, and tie performance to management and even budgets, then as an agency you can't dodge responsibility. And that's terrifying to the bureaucratic mind." Yet terror can be a force for good. In the fifties and sixties, for example, when the IRS audited more returns and hauled more people in for cheating on their taxes, tax compliance was higher than it is now because people were scared they'd get caught. The same principle holds true here: As long as agencies think there's a possibility of evaluation, they're more likely to do their jobs.

The Democrats' task now is to prove that the feds can accomplish smart things and be held accountable for broad policy outcomes like repairing bridges or housing the poor, even when the federal role is simply writing a check to a state or local government. And while Clinton and Gore are avoiding the Carter/LBJ mistake of instant implementation, the past tells us that an administration's interest in government reform dims as the years wear on. Because private sector renovations of this scale take 10 to 12 years—an eternity in politics, where turnover is the rule, not the exception—what sounds grand today will seem dated before long. Just ask Fred Malek, who was Nixon's OMB point man on Management by Objectives, a plan launched in 1971 to make agencies map out strategic plans and base budget decisions on their progress. (Sound familiar?) "This was a great plan, and a workable one," Malek says now. "But the big push for it had to come in 1974—and as you know, President Nixon and his men had other things on their minds in 1974." If the incumbent administration fails to bring along Congress and defeat the bureaucrats this time, the next guys who try this will have to contend with a system that much more experienced at pulling the plug on the most gee-whiz of reinventions. And the system's got plenty of experience at that already. □

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WHO'S WHO

Here is a partial list of the Hollywoodites who have visited the White House since **Bill** and **Hillary Clinton** arrived: **Billy Crystal, Sally Field, Judy Collins, Christine Lahti, Richard Dreyfuss, Barbra Streisand, Jack Nicholson, Sharon Stone, Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Lindsey Wagner, John Ritter, Christopher Reeve,** and **Sam Waterston**. . . .

All is still apparently not well in the White House's troubled speech and communications shop. While **George Stephanopoulos** took the fall, the real blame, observers say, may lie with **David Dreyer**, the deputy in charge of message, an area the **Clinton** presidency has still not mastered. . . .

The good news is that a hot new White House speechwriter has emerged: **Jeremy Rosner**, who works for the National Security Council. Rosner wrote **Clinton's** acclaimed speech at Waseda University in Tokyo and his foreign policy speech at American University. . . .

Hillary Rodham Clinton, during her years in the Arkansas governor's mansion, donated clothing to Goodwill and the Salvation Army, taking tax deductions, according to the August issue of *The American Spectator*, ranging from $1,000 to $2,300 each—including $3 for each of **Bill Clinton**'s used undershirts and $1 each for the governor's and **Chelsea**'s used underpants.

The credentials of the *Spectator* author, **Lisa Schiffren**, may not, it should be noted, strike some of our readers as persuasive. She is a former speechwriter for **Dan Quayle**. She also alleges that the Clintons have put Chelsea's sitter on the White House payroll; that it cost Arkansas $750,000 a year to feed and care for its governor; and that Clinton completely controlled a $19,000 "public relations" fund but didn't report it as income as the law required. In 1989, under legislative pressure, Clinton began paying taxes on the money. . . .

According to a forthcoming book by **Rick Atkinson**, within minutes after a **Norman Schwarzkopf** Gulf War briefing in which the General showed the press an Air Force film that he said depicted the destruction of seven Iraqi Scud missiles, he was told that the CIA believed they were oil tanker trucks, not Scuds. The General never corrected the record. In fact, a House Armed Services committee report released after we read Atkinson's book says "a postwar review of photographs cannot produce even a single confirmed kill of a Scud missile."

Another significant departure from reality may have occurred when the General continued to assert that Iraq had 623,000 soldiers in the Kuwaiti theater. **Schwarzkopf** said we were "really outnumbered two-to-one" at the time the ground war began, but postwar Army estimates put Iraqi strength at roughly 300,000, and the House committee puts the figure at 183,000. The Allies, meanwhile, had a total of 700,000 troops. . . .

One fact about **Vince Foster** that may have added to his worries was his continuing work for the **Clintons** on personal matters while he was being paid by the government to serve as deputy White House counsel. People who work in the White House counsel office, and sometimes even the attorney general, lawyers say, can make the error of thinking of themselves as the president's lawyer when in theory they are supposed to be representing the public interest, which is not always the same as the president's. **John Dean** and **John Mitchell** are among the most prominent victims of this syndrome. . . .

While **Bob Kerrey** strutted and fretted in the halls *outside* the budget conference committee, observers say the real heroes were **Daniel Patrick Moynihan** and **Dick Gephardt**, both of whom cut the deals and rode herd on distracted—and distracting—colleagues to get **Clinton's** budget through. And despite the gathering clouds of scandal, **Dan Rostentowski** also rose to the occasion, coming in third in terms of effectiveness to Moynihan and Gephardt. . . .

One White House problem **David Gergen** has already solved is what Washington reporters were calling "the anecdote crisis." It seems **Dee Dee Myers** and **George Stephanopoulos** were reluctant to parcel out tidbits of the **Clintons'** backstage life—like what the president was munching on when he ordered the airstrike on Baghdad.

With Gergen on the scene, those stories are now flowing. But guess who's usually in the starring role? Gergen. In one paper, we read about **Bob Kerrey's** agonies over the budget. His telephone rings. It's David Gergen, who asks, "Would it help if we talked?" After a meal with Gergen, Kerrey sees the light. There are many other similar anecdotes, all of them useful in a vague way to repairing Bill Clinton's relations with a hungry press. But the stories are more directly flattering to someone else. . . .

—*Susan Threadgill*

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The Filtered Truth

With low tar cigarettes, rather than stonewall the health issue, tobacco companies exploit it. Here's how

by David Segal

The Surgeon General's office declared war on smoking in 1966 and 29 years into the fight, it's hard to tell who's winning. Yes, the percent of adult Americans who smoke has dwindled from 40 percent in 1964 to 25 percent in 1992. But since the U.S. population has increased over that period, the total number of cigarettes annually sold has dipped only slightly. The first 25 years of the anti-smoking campaign avoided or postponed 789,000 deaths. But smoking claimed about half that many lives in 1985 *alone*. Anti-smoking forces point out that recent morbidity figures reflect the bad habits of older smokers 20 years ago. But three thousand teenagers take up smoking each day.

Of course, if the Surgeons General and their allies have managed anything close to a draw in this battle, they all deserve medals. This isn't what you'd call a fair fight. The tobacco industry spends upwards of $4 billion per year on advertising and promotion, pushing a product more addictive than either heroin or cocaine. And thanks to the industry's friends in Congress, using government to protect smokers has been extremely difficult. By legislative fiat, cigarettes were excluded from the Consumer Product Safety Act and the Fair Labeling and Packaging Act. Tobacco is also exempted from the Toxic Substances Act, even though a cigarette has more benzine in it than what was thought to be in Perrier, and more cyanide in it than was found in those tainted Chilean grapes. The Food and Drug Administration won't get involved because it decided about 90 years ago that tobacco isn't a drug and hasn't changed its mind since. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms is only interested in whether cigarette makers have paid taxes. The courts haven't been helpful because juries tend to believe that warning labels shield the industry from liability, which is why the companies were proponents of the pack warning when it was first introduced. In sum, the most destructive of commonly bought consumer products is also the most insulated and hardest to curb.

Outspent and outmaneuvered, the health advocates' strategy has been simple and effective: spread the word about the hazards of smoking. Today, 80 percent of smokers say they want to quit. That may sound like a factoid that makes cigarette executives dyspeptic—as it turns out, it's a factoid that makes them money. Back in the sixties, right around the time that the public mind began connecting cigarettes to cancer, the tobacco industry started marketing low tar, low nicotine cigarettes to meet consumer demands for "safer" smoke (tar is what gives cigarettes flavor and causes disease; nicotine is what keeps smokers addicted). Since then, low yield cigarettes have steadily captured more and more of the market. In 1967, low tar cigarettes—15 mg or less—had two percent of the market; today they have just under 60 percent.

You'd think, and the cigarette companies would have you believe, that this stampede to low tar would result in a net health gain for all concerned. In fact, the surge in low tar sales marks the triumph of one of Tobacco's most brazen and successful cons—a con which has helped make cigarettes the nation's leading cause of preventable deaths. While polls show

Reasearch assistance for this article was provided by Maia Garau, Jennifer Levitsky, and Spencer Freedman.

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that millions of adults now believe that low tar means safer, a welter of scientific evidence says just the opposite: Any possible benefits to trading in that heavy-duty Camel for something lighter are substantially, often entirely, offset by changes in the way people smoke. "*What* you smoke," says Jeffrey Harris, a physician and health economist at MIT, "is not nearly as important as *how* you smoke." Since people tend to make up for reductions in tar and nicotine by inhaling harder, many scientists, and the Surgeon General's office, believe low yield cigarettes are actually a *greater* hazard to smokers' health.

All of which has made marketing low tar cigarettes a challenge worthy of the tobacco companies' renowned cunning. Not only have they convinced people that an unsafe product is safe, but they have devised some nifty ways to make sure that customers are ingesting lots more tar and nicotine than they realize—thus making it harder for smokers to quit. The two most important techniques behind it all are a packaging trick to fool buyers, and a little shady science to fool the government.

Pack rats

Keeping addiction levels high was easy back when no one thought cigarettes were harmful and the average cigarette yielded nearly three times the tar of today's offerings. But when health concerns grew, the industry could either provide smokers with lower tar and nicotine alternatives or risk losing their business altogether. So the industry set up "brand families"—choices under the same label with successively lower tar and nicotine ratings. Typically, companies now offer three rungs down the ladder, ranging from regular tar (16 to 12 mg), to low (12 to 6 mg), to ultra low (under 6 mg).

For smokers trying to kick the habit "switching down"—hop-scotching to progressively lower ratings of tar and nicotine—is the most painless way to quit. This, of course, is how nicotine patches work, so at first glance these brand families are enough to make you misty-eyed about cigarette executives setting aside foolish self-interest and helping smokers to toss their ashtrays forever. But look a little closer and you'll see that as smokers are trying to switch down, the

Victor Juhasz

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tobacco companies are doing everything they can to fill smokers with as much tar and nicotine as possible.

Brand families are usually large and bewildering; there are variations of size (85s, 100s, kings, regulars), filter (mentholated, regular, light, ultra light), and pack (hard, soft). There are 16 different types of Marlboros, for instance, and 17 different kinds of Merits. Sound like it might get confusing? It's supposed to. Smokers who aren't paying attention get fooled and, more importantly, get more nicotine. The Virginia Slims 100 mentholated slim light, for example, is rated at 8 mg of tar and .6 mg of nicotine. The Virginia Slims 120 mentholated slim light is rated at 13 tar and 1.1 nicotine. Why so much more tar and nicotine for 20 milligrams more cigarette?

"Because the 120 is longer," says Karen Daragan, a spokesperson for Phillip Morris.

Daragan didn't know why the company crammed that extra 20 percent of cigarette with about 70 percent more tar and nicotine. But look at some other packaging high jinks and you can take your own guess. Carlton 100s in the hardpack are rated at 1 mg of tar and .1 mg of nicotine. But Carlton 100s in the softpack—same cigarette, different pack—are rated at 2 mg and .2 mg of tar. NOW kings in the hardpack are less than .5 mg of tar and less than .5 mg of nicotine; NOW kings in the softpack are 1 mg of tar and .1 mg of nicotine. That's like Budweiser doubling the alcohol for the can version of a beer they also make in a bottle.

Why twice the tar and nicotine for what you'd think was an identical cigarette?

"Smokers may have told us that they wanted that," ventures Dee Dee Whitt, spokesperson for R.J. Reynolds. "There are probably different blends in the two packs. It's no big deal."

Roger Baker, a spokesperson for American Brands, the makers of Carlton, offers a historical explanation. "The Carlton 100s in the softpack came out first, in September 1977, and the hardpack came out in December of 1980," he says.

Good to know, but not exactly what you'd call a reason. Baker also put forth the size argument: "The Carlton 100 in the softpack is fractionally larger," he says.

He's right. Softpack cigarettes are three to five millimeters longer, which means that for five percent more cigarette, you get 100 percent more tar and nicotine. It also means that by switching from hard- to softpack you effectively double the level of your nicotine addiction.

It's the same story for tens of hard- and softpack brands. Frederick Gahagan, a former researcher for the cigarette companies in the seventies and eighties, says that the hard pack switcheroo is part of a marketing strategy as timeless as used car sales. "They advertise the heck out of the hardpack, and then they put the softpack in heavy distribution," says Gahagan, whose New York-based survey company performed research projects for Brown & Williamson and R.J. Reynolds. "The customer comes in and asks for the hardpack. The guy behind the counter says 'We're out of it, but I've got the softpack.' So the smoker switches up without even knowing it." Gahagan says that marketers at both R.J. Reynolds and Brown & Williamson told him they use this sales tactic.

Does it work? American Brands, the only company which would share information about sales by pack, reports that Carlton's softpack market share is 25 percent larger than the hardpack's (.3 to .25 percent, respectively). Given that 1 percent of the cigarette market is worth $80 million in *profits,* the difference means the softpack outnets the hard to the tune of $4 million each year.

Over draft

Even before smokers have the chance to unwittingly double their level of addiction, cigarette makers have ensured that their product is more addictive than advertised. The FTC publishes an annual report of the tar and nicotine levels of every cigarette on the market. (The tests themselves, by the way, are conducted by the Tobacco Institute, the lobbying arm of the cigarette companies.) Trouble is, these official ratings are derived from a machine test which is hopelessly outdated and consistently gives "safer" cigarettes a lower tar and nicotine rating than what the cigarettes actually deliver.

The test is easy to fool because it is conducted by a machine. A cigarette is held by a tube, then a syringe is attached to its butt end which then extracts one draw of smoke every minute and passes the smoke through a pad. The pad is then

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weighed and studied. This is a lousy approximation of human smoking, especially in the low and ultra low tar category. The filters on these cigarettes have vents which pull air into the filter as a smoker inhales, diluting the tar and nicotine. The air vents are usually 11 to 13 millimeters from the end of the cigarette, but the machine's "lips" only cover the first 10 millimeters. When the machine smokes, the vents work, but when people smoke they cover the holes with their fingers or lips. This can up the tar rating by as much as 500 percent. (The machine tester was designed in the fifties before anyone thought of putting air vents on cigarettes.) Also, the machine's one-draw-per-minute pace is far from the norm. It was established back when cigarettes averaged 37 mg of tar, a strength which would send today's smokers into la-la land. Because of filters, the average puff rate is now one every 34 seconds. The upshot is that low and ultra low tar cigarettes are underrated relative to regular cigarettes, and, in absolute terms, they are more addictive and more dangerous than their ratings imply.

Aside from anti-smoking advocates, about the only cries of foul play heard about machine-testing chicanery, ironically enough, have been from the cigarette companies themselves. Back in 1983, launching a new brand called Barclay, Brown & Williamson created a filter which had air vents right at the tip, where the mouth meets the cigarette. Thanks to those vents, the FTC test awarded Barclay with a 1 mg tar and .1 mg nicotine rating, putting it squarely in the ultra low category. But when people smoked the cigarettes, within three or four puffs they crushed the air vents with their lips or fingers. Within a minute or two of lighting up, the actual tar rating was somewhere between 3 and 7 mg.

Other cigarette makers recognized that ultra low tar smokers who happened onto a Barclay would think they had found a cigarette that gave them superior taste, and maybe even a neat buzz, with what appeared to be an extremely low tar rating. Brown & Williamson stood to swipe hordes of ultra low tar smokers from other brands. A group of cigarette companies howled to the FTC, which then successfully sued Brown & Williamson, forcing it to stop advertising Barclay with its false ratings. The unwritten rule of the industry is that cheating the machine is all right as long all the players are cheating at roughly the same rate.

Heavy breathing

Even if low tar smokers scrupulously avoid the bait and switch, and even if the FTC roused itself to update machine testing, low tar enthusiasts face a far larger problem: their cigarettes. What has been lost amid the industry's cheering about lower ratings is the more important issue of smoking technique. "People vary tremendously in their style of smoking," says MIT health expert Jeffrey Harris. "Scientists now study how deeply you inhale, how much pressure you put on the cigarette, whether you hold the smoke in the back of your throat, and if so, for how long."

A spate of scientific findings over the last 13 years suggest that the answers to these questions are more relevant to the state of your lungs than the kind of cigarette you smoke. Typical was a study made public in August by the American Lung Association which analyzed saliva and breath samples of 300 smokers and found that carbon dioxide levels were "barely distinguishable" between smokers of low yield cigarettes and those smoking regulars. In 1980, *The British Medical Journal* found that "Despite large differences in nicotine yield, there was no relation between blood concentration and the type of cigarette smoked."

The problem is what epidemiologists call "compensation," the tendency to make up for reductions in tar and nicotine with stronger inhalations. Rather than settling comfortably into their reduced levels of tar and nicotine, most low tar smokers draw on their cigarettes harder—a lot harder. In 1982, the medical journal *Thorax* published a study of 1,316 men smoking their usual brands and found that "smokers of ventilated filter cigarettes inhaled 82 percent more than smokers of plain cigarettes." At that rate, possible health advantages are either drastically reduced or totally eliminated.

Or worse. By pulling harder into their lungs using low tar cigarettes, smokers can actually

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raise their risk of disease. "The reality is that disease is not caused by the number of cigarettes you light but by inhalation, deposition and retention of cigarette smoke in the lungs," says Dr. David Burns, a professor at University of California at San Diego's School of Medicine. "If you inhale more deeply into the lung, a larger fraction of tar is deposited there." The 1989 Surgeon General's report agreed, finding that "Compensatory smoking behavior in response to lower nicotine intake might actually increase the intake of tobacco smoke toxins in some individuals."

Tar and pleasure

None of this is news to cigarette makers, although for years they have said only that they make low tar cigarettes because consumers like them. (Stating that low tar is safer would imply that some cigarettes are less safe or unsafe, something no cigarette maker would concede.) But Big Tobacco spends millions annually on market research, and it knows that people smoke low tar cigarettes because they perceive them as healthier. This became clear in a very public way in 1988 when a group of cigarette companies sued the Canadian government over its Tobacco Products Control Act, a law severely restricting cigarette advertising. In the course of the trial, Imperial Tobacco, which is owned by British American Tobacco Company (the same folks who own Brown & Williamson), was forced to produce some internal research documents which laid bare the myth that low tar cigarettes are just a way to give the people what they want.

Commenting on cigarettes with less than 6 mg of tar, one report said that "We have evidence of virtually no quitting among smokers of those brands, and there are indications that the advent of ultra low tar cigarettes has actually retained some potential quitters in the cigarette market by offering them a viable alternative." Imperial also was well aware that smokers have to pull harder to derive any pleasure from their low tar cigarettes. One focus group study called "Project Eli" quoted one smoker saying "You have to really haul on it just to get anything. It's just like sucking air." Another said, "Every puff is an instant hernia." Project Eli found one smoker who sealed up cigarette vents with scotch tape.

The Imperial Tobacco documents were important to the Canadian government's case because if cigarette makers intend to sell low tar cigarettes as safer, then the companies are making a health claim about the product, which means it can be far more stringently regulated. The court eventually found against the Canadian tobacco companies in 1991, letting stand some of the toughest advertising cigarette restrictions in the world.

You'd expect that the example up north might have some relevance here because the FDA is supposed to regulate any product intended to mitigate a disease or addiction. The key concept here is intent, which our Supreme Court has said can be discerned through advertising. Unfortunately for health advocates, the FDA has so far not found any health claims in low tar ads, and in 1988 simply didn't rule on a petition from the Coalition on Smoking OR Health urging the agency to classify all low yield cigarettes as drugs. Today, the FDA is in the odd position of forcing makers of the nicotine patch, which is part of the solution, to jump through countless regulatory hoops, even though low tar cigarettes, which are part of the problem, haven't jumped through any.

"Lower tar cigarettes are in response to consumer demand," says Bill Wordham of the Tobacco Institute, delivering the party line. "We make no health claims whatsoever."

Well, sort of. One Vantage magazine ad read, "If you smoke and are concerned about your health, switch to Vantage." A Carlton ad pleaded, "If you smoke, please try Carltons." But Wordham is right that most low tar ads just prattle about delivering great taste with less tar. Under the circumstances, claiming anything more is crazy. And unnecessary, since people are already convinced that lower tar and nicotine means safer. One survey conducted by Gallup this year found that 48.6 percent of adults, smokers and non-smokers, think low yield means safer.

Numbers like these make the issue of intent seem spectacularly beside the point. That the smoking public has been sold the low tar bill of goods sounds like reason enough to spur the FDA into action. Cigarette makers shouldn't be allowed to cash in on the very health fears that they and their product have created, especially since what they offer as a safe haven for worried smokers is so demonstrably dangerous. □

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Sometime this fall, the Clinton administration will announce its plan to overhaul America's $900 billion-a-year health care system. For 20 years, this magazine has urged the adoption of a national health insurance plan in which everyone is covered and the government strictly controls costs. Such a system works in Canada, and with careful adaptation, this is a worthy starting point for U.S. health care reform. Yet Washington is paralyzed, unable to consider, let alone adopt, models which require a drastically reduced role for private insurers. In the following section, we explain why the capital's insider culture pays so little attention to Canada's experience, which we remain convinced points the way to real reform. Then we offer dramatic solutions that will work whether we keep or reform the present system: First, how to quickly move doctors out of expensive specialities and int general practice, and second, how to efficiently reform Medicare to cost less and work better.

Dead On Arrival

Why Washington's power elites won't consider single payer health reform

by Tom Hamburger and Ted Marmor

In February, Dr. Quentin Young flew to Washington from his home in Chicago, pleased to have been asked to consult with top White House officials on health care. Young, the past president of Physicians for a National Health Program, was looking forward to plumping for his organization's favorite cause: Adapting Canada's national health insurance system to the United States.

Young had an attractive case to make: Canada, where provincial governments act as single insurers, annually spends 30 percent less per capita than we do for health care, providing universal coverage, cost controls, and choice of physician. The U.S. fails to insure 37 million people and has no control over rising costs, and a Harvard University survey of 10 nations found that Canadians were the most satisfied with their health-care system; Americans were the least.

But Young's enthusiasm quickly withered within the White House gates. It turned out, in Young's words, that he had been invited for "pseudo consultation." White House staff made it clear that single payer was off the table. "Why?" Young asked, amazed. A senior White House health adviser, Walter Zelman, put it bluntly: "Single payer is not politically feasible."

In a separate session with Hillary Rodham Clinton, Dr. David Himmelstein of Harvard Medical School (a close colleague of Young's), also pressed the single-payer point. Canada's solution, he said, made sense for the United States. Himmelstein's studies, published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* since 1986, show that the U.S. could save as much as $67 billion in administrative costs alone by cutting out the 1,500 private insurers and going to a single government insurer in each state—easily enough to pay to cover every uninsured American.

Hillary Clinton had heard it all before. How, she asked Himmelstein, do you defeat the multi-billion dollar insurance industry? "With presidential leadership and polls showing that 70 percent of Americans favor

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[the features of] a single-payer system," Himmelstein recalls telling Mrs. Clinton. The First Lady replied: "Tell me something interesting, David."

So by February, fewer than six weeks into the Clinton presidency, the White House had made its key policy decision: Before the Health Care Task Force wrote a single page of its 22-volume report to the President, the single payer idea was written off, and "managed competition" was in. But why should an intelligent First Lady and her 500 health care advisers *not* want to debate every option, especially examples available from nations that have combined universal access and cost control?

Because in Washington's political culture, incremental change is the coin of the realm, and a move to single payer is seen as anything but incremental. (Though in fact, managed competition proposes a more drastic shift in health care delivery for most Americans than single payer does.) "I've been in so many meetings in Washington where people say, 'We've got to fashion something that's acceptable to the interest groups,'" says Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone, one of the few single payer champions. "And I know what groups they put at the top of the list—the health care and insurance lobbies." But there's more to the failure to discuss single payer than lobbyists and their clout. Some politicians fear being caricatured as advocates of "big government" in an age of sound bite politics. And some fear being dismissed as irrelevant for supporting a cause that's thought to be outside the mainstream. What constitutes the mainstream? To understand that, consider how the capital's three established tribes—the politicians, the press, and the experts—slid single payer off the table without allowing people to decide for themselves whether it should be adopted:

- First, politicians like Mrs. Clinton fear the bitter, unique opposition of the health insurance industry to single payer. Doctors, hospitals, and health insurers will oppose elements of any reform, but only a single payer plan means the virtual abolition of an entire industry as we know it. Politicians who are reluctant to take on established interests in Washington ($60 million in medical and insurance PAC contributions since 1980) and back home (insurance agents in every Rotary Club in every district) are terrified by the anger that would result from putting health insurers out of business. Combining this with the normal opposition any reform provokes and with a political process that discourages full debate, politicians duck the merits of the issue and dismiss single payer as not feasible.
- Once this political fact has been established in the hearts and minds of politicians, the people who might be expected to raise out-of-the-mainstream questions—reporters—are generally too focused on politics, not on substance, to do anything more than reflect prevailing opinion rather than informing it.
- Finally, the experts who might be expected to rise above the political currents resist seriously appraising Canada for fear of being dismissed as cranks or out-of-touch with *realpolitik*. Those experts who *do* argue for single payer are penalized by having to chase research dollars with more difficulty at foundations where insurance executives are a presence. And so it is that an industry which employs 140,000 agents in the U.S. helps kill reform that would help 250 million Americans.

There's the human drama, too, of watching these tribes operate in unhealthy symbiosis. Once something is thought to be off the agenda—as single payer has appeared to be—then it's death for a Washington player, no matter how established, to keep banging away. Take Rep. Jim McDermott, a Seattle Democrat, who despite years of talking up single payer still feels the sharp dismissiveness of his colleagues and understands why so few people challenge the status quo. A few months ago, McDermott and the rest of his state's congressional delegation won the coveted invitation to fly with Clinton on Air Force One to the Pacific Northwest's Timber Summit. In that collegial atmosphere, at the center of power, the politicians congregated around the President in his cabin.

McDermott raised his hand, and everyone groaned. "He's going to ask about single payer again," they muttered. He wasn't, but it didn't matter. "You get stereotyped and people act like they know what you're thinking and they become dismissive without listening to what you have to say," says McDermott, a psychiatrist who came to Congress in 1988. "You have to put up with a certain amount of ridicule. This is an issue on which everybody has an opinion. And if you choose the wrong solution, you can be defeated."

The word is out among Democrats in the capital: Positions like McDermott's, which appear to

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contradict the Clintons' approach, are considered disloyal to the new President. More to the point, the conventional wisdom goes, *why* would any halfway savvy Washingtonian want to fool with something that's off the table? Among the politicians and the press, where does this conventional wisdom begin to form?

Welcome to the world of the Sperling breakfast group. In the understated elegance of the Sheraton Carlton Hotel, two blocks from the White House, Washington print reporters meet several times a week with prominent news sources. The event, hosted by *The Christian Science Monitor*'s Godfrey Sperling Jr., recalls an older, more genteel era in Washington. Old in style, the setting reflects the continuing nature of most Washington journalism: Reporters transcribing the thoughts and words of highly placed sources.

When Bobby Rush, a newly elected congressman, got to Washington, he initially balked at backing the single payer system he had advocated during his campaign. He told one group that "important supporters"—health care lobbies gave him $13,750 during his campaign—might not understand.

Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell dropped by one of these gatherings in July. Even before the waiters brought out the bacon and eggs, the questions turned to health care: Do you favor consideration of Canadian style health reform, the most popular solution among your constituents in Maine?

"No," Mitchell said bluntly. Canada's system may be good for Canada, but "it will not be enacted" in Washington. Americans want an American solution. (A phrase Mrs. Clinton would also use during her working July holiday in Hawaii, sitting poolside with reporters.) A couple of months before, when Mitchell met with *The Wall Street Journal*'s lunch group at the same hotel, he outlined the key elements he would like to see in a reformed American health system. His answer was crisp and precise: insurance coverage for all; controlled costs; consumer choice of physician and hospital; renewed emphasis on primary over specialized care; and flexibility for states to tailor the plan for their own needs. (All of which perfectly describe the Canadian plan.)

When pressed on the point, Mitchell said, "I respect the Canadian system. . . But we ought to select the system that's based on the practices and standards of our country. When very wealthy people—kings and prime ministers and others of means—in other countries get sick, they don't go to Canada. They don't go to Germany. They don't go to Japan. They come to the United States." Reporters at the Sheraton dutifully recorded Mitchell's words. Never mind that foreign leaders regularly use their own systems in Germany, Japan, Canada, and elsewhere. Never mind that just a few years ago, Mitchell's Senate colleague, the late Spark Matsunaga of Hawaii, went to Canada for new, high-tech cancer treatments that were unavailable in the U.S.

With such broad agreement on what health reform should provide, why don't the Canadian or the German or the Australian systems get more seriously considered? The short answer is fear. For politicians, this means mostly fear of political attack, fear of taking on powerful American myths, and fear of incurring the wrath of the well-endowed health care and insurance industries. And politicians fear being left out of the game. That means they talk the prevailing talk, and think the prevailing thoughts, instead of realistically appraising proposed reforms or genuinely evaluating foreign experience.

Mitchell is well aware of the power of advertising to defeat single payer advocates. His Republican colleague from Maine, Senator William Cohen, beat a Democratic challenger in 1990 in the nation's first election to turn almost entirely on health reform. Cohen's opponent, Neil Rolde, openly championed the Canadian-style system, but Cohen's campaign was guided by Republican pollster Bill McInturff, a clever conservative with an uncanny knack for packaging effective attacks.

"We trashed the hell out of the Canadian system," McInturff recalled. Foreshadowing the tack Bush took in his own re-election campaign, McInturff described how he planned ads attacking national health insurance with footage of a crowded department-of-motor-vehicles waiting line. The ominous voiceover? "This is your

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health care system if we go to a national plan." McInturff's GOP strategy rightly assumed that voters associate Democrats with big government, high taxes, and bureaucratic hassles. So McInturff shrewdly responded to a Democratic national health proposal by raising the specter of big government run amok, linking Canada with this dismal image. And McInturff was among those who recommended a line that Bush would later use in 1992: Universal health insurance, the President said, would operate "with the efficiency of the U.S. Postal Service and the compassion of the KGB."

But Clinton, as usual, was a step ahead of Bush—and, by extension, of McInturff. In the Democratic primary campaign, Clinton regularly referred to what we could learn from the experience of other nations. But in the general election campaign, Clinton suddenly adopted the phrase "managed competition" to define his variant of health insurance reform. Few understood then or now what he meant, but no one—especially political or industry opponents—could accuse him of foisting "failed" foreign ideas on the good old U.S. of A.

The institutional pressure on politicians to play it safe is powerfully dramatized in the cautious attitude of a reformer elected with Clinton: Rep. Bobby Rush of Chicago. In 1992, Rush, a former Black Panther, campaigned as an advocate of Canadian style reform. But once introduced to the pressures of Washington, his former supporters claim he became skittish about co-sponsoring a single payer solution. Rush shocked Quentin Young and others by refusing to co-sponsor Jim McDermott's single payer bill in the House. Rush told supporters, including Young, that as part of leadership (House Speaker Tom Foley had made Rush a freshman whip) it would be difficult for him to support a non-administration bill, and that important supporters (medical, hospital, and insurance PACs donated $13,750 to Rush's campaign) would also not understand if he went along with the single payers. Outraged Chicago health activists who had supported Rush pressed him hard, and eventually he signed on. A Rush spokesperson says that Rush was just being "deliberate" as he considered a complex subject and did not delay because of other pressures. But when the tribal need to be accepted as part of the system is so strong that someone like Rush hesitates, it's little wonder that politicians of lesser proven conviction slip so readily into complacency.

No, Canada

So if politicians fear treading in the single-payer arena, why aren't journalists learning and talking about Canada and other foreign experience? Why are discussions of these matters relegated to largely arcane academic journals and occasional features? To be sure, there are thoughtful mainstream pieces from time to time. This July, *The New York Times* ran a detailed article explaining the advantages of Ontario's system of caring for the elderly. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* ran an extensive three-part series in April comparing Canadian, German, and American patient care.

But most of the time, almost any news story in Canada about waiting lists, a disappointed physician, or the lack of funds for doctors or hospitals finds its way into congressional testimony and into American news stories. Medical pressure groups do the digging and journalists do the disseminating. Because America's journalistic ethic of quoting both sides gives equal space to those who praise Canada and those who criticize it, articles repeat myths about Canada without analyzing them.

For example, in March, *The New York Times* ran a major front page piece headlined: "Patients Footing the Bill Amid Canadian Cutbacks: Spending Outstrips Government's Ability to Pay." Read beyond that alarming head and there was quite different news: The Canadian system is widely popular and 95 percent of all Canadians reported receiving the care they needed within 24 hours. The cutbacks? The Canadian government had decided not to reimburse its citizens any longer for electrolysis removal of unwanted hair.

A search of 100 health care articles in *The Washington Post* since April found that only 10 percent dealt substantially with Canada; 70 percent focused on leaks from the Health Care Task Force and on the political implications of the Clinton plan. Only three focused critically on managed competition. A cover story in the *Post*'s health supplement in June trumpeted a financial crunch hitting Canada's system. The

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cover art? Bill and Hillary as Adam and Eve in a health care Garden of Eden looking at a half-eaten Canadian apple. The headline? "The Model is Tempting, But. . . ." The lead? Canadians "know well how expensive it is to run a national system with universal coverage: They have one and evidence is mounting that they can't afford it." This makes little sense. Costs have risen over the past decade in Canada but nowhere near the rate U.S. costs have. So if we have non-universal coverage and spend 14 percent of GNP, how can a system with universal coverage that costs 9 percent of GNP illustrate the point that Canadians "know well how expensive it is to run a system with universal coverage?" Viewing the U.S. from Canada reveals exactly the opposite: It shows how expensive it is *not* to have universal coverage and cost constraints.

Why do things like this get into print? First, there's the matter of sophistication. Few American journalists spend enough time studying the health systems of other developed democracies to know that the lessons thought peculiar to Canada are in fact quite general. Germany, France, Japan, Australia, and Canada all combine universal coverage with budget limits and considerable bargaining power in the hands of payers. Second, there's the matter of drama. (In mainstream journalism, bad news is always more interesting than good news.) So for dramatic reasons, even when stories explaining the benefits of Canadian or European systems do appear, they tend to be underplayed. For example, when the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reported in May that a single payer system could provide universal health care and still cut costs by $14 billion a year, the *Post* ran a single column story inside the paper that never referred to Canada. A second CBO report in July saying that a Canadian style plan would save more money than any other proposal—including managed competition—ran on page A15.

There are other factors at work here, too. Even after Watergate and Iran-*contra*, journalists are still reluctant to challenge the statements of public officials. During the 1992 campaign, for example, Paul Tsongas flatly dismissed the idea of national health insurance. Dramatically, Tsongas said he might be dead today if he had been living in Canada because the medical technology that saved his life from cancer was unavailable there. But it was not true. In fact, the treatment Tsongas needed was developed by Toronto doctors and is available to Canadians with little or no delay from the surgeons who helped invent it. At the time, most reporters never bothered to check whether Tsongas' remark were true; *The New Yorker* and *The Chicago Tribune* followed up and told readers that a major presidential aspirant didn't know what he was talking about.

Why aren't more reporters and news organizations up there examining the system for themselves? Why do they fail to investigate exaggerated complaints and underplay positive reports? They aren't corrupt or bought off by the insurance industry. The more compelling explanation is less scandalous, but more serious. Over and over again, reporters hear that the Canadian system "is not politically feasible." Over and over again, they hear that Canada is not the perfect system advocates make it out to be. These messages do not come solely from the spoonfeeding at lunch and breakfast meetings. Most importantly, once health care becomes a political issue, it is assigned to *political* reporters, not medical reporters, and the politicos naturally judge everything through a "can-this-pass" filter. And reporters, confronting a complicated subject, are generally afraid of asking questions when they think the answers must be obvious to everybody else. Politicians and interest group spokesmen can therefore spin like tops, using statistics and scenarios that the reporters don't know enough to challenge.

Even the "MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour," which makes unusual efforts to air the full range of health care opinion, dramatizes the problems. In May, health reporter Stuart Schear arranged a four-guest debate on single payer versus managed competition. One of the managed competition critics mysteriously dropped his opposition on the air, leaving only Dr. Steffie Woolhandler, a Harvard colleague of David Himmelstein's, to make the Canadian case. At the end of the interview, MacNeil noted that Woolhandler was in the minority and then asked: "If this [managed competition] is the program that has political consensus and the other one that you advocate [single payer] is considered impossible politically at the moment, why are you then against the one that is viable and would produce a large amount of reform?"

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While Woolhandler rejected the assumption that managed competition would produce meaningful reform, MacNeil's question—designed as it may have been to elicit an interesting response—reinforced the impression that single payer was simply not feasible.

Health snare

If most politicians dwell in fear of insurance industry enmity and political irrelevance, and if most reporters ingest that view without thinking, then where are we? Where can reporters and moderate and liberal politicians turn in the health care debate? Quick—to the Rolodex. How about the outside experts?

Unfortunately, the cultural imperatives that shut down political and journalistic inquiry are also at work in think tanks and universities. Experts fear being labeled as out of touch as much as the politicians and the press. Take Henry Aaron, the highly-regarded senior economist at the Brookings Institution, whose 1991 book on health care, *Serious and Unstable Condition*, was widely noted in Washington. Aaron's book painstakingly reviews our troubled "condition," reports the experience of other industrial democracies, and then outlines a solution which in fact reflects principles applied abroad. But he devotes just one paragraph to Canada, and his proposed solution builds on private insurance. Intellectually honest, Aaron almost apologetically explains his surrender to presumed political constraint: "Although a wholly public plan probably could achieve some additional savings. . . [my plan] is predicated on the unwillingness of Congress to shift the bulk of currently private health care arrangements for most Americans." No one wants to be left out.

And some say there appears a financial price to be paid if one goes too far beyond what is regarded as the conventional wisdom. Consider the case of David Himmelstein, an authority on the costs of bureaucracy in the American and Canadian health systems. His studies, conducted with Woolhandler, appear regularly in *The New England Journal of Medicine* and, though controversial, have been used by the General Accounting Office, journalists, and congressional committees to compare health systems. Yet their research has been done on a shoestring: The two doctors actually had to pool their academic salaries to pay research expenses. (And though the research is cited, it's not generally understood and runs into the journalistic he said/she said confusion.)

Private funding for research on single payer systems is far more difficult to find than money for other kinds of health care research, Himmelstein says, unless you make clear that conclusions will be negative. "Our personal experience is that research that may show the superiority of a single payer system is somewhere between difficult and impossible to fund," Himmelstein said. In 11 years, their only funded project was "only indirectly related to single payer work." Himmelstein has been complaining of bias for years. One foundation vice president told him, in confidence, that his work would never be funded. "There is a person on our board," the foundation official said, "who will veto any proposal that would lead to the abolition of the health insurance industry. A specific piece of research that leads to the implication that the health insurance industry should be done away with is completely unfundable." Himmelstein looked around and saw that most of the foundation boards he was applying to had members connected to the insurance industry.

Of course, serious students of single-payer systems *can* be funded (full disclosure: both authors of this article have been); it's just harder, and that's important. Inside Washington, experts tend to play the game as it's played by the politicians and the press: Focus on the possibilities of the moment. For that reason, both Brookings and the Urban Institute, the respectable left-of-center think tanks, now largely ignore single payer plans. So there is an imbalance with important implications: Reformers suck up to the "feasible," and the forces for the status quo spread the myths and exacerbate the problem.

The upshot of this systematic relationship between journalists, politicians, and experts is confusion about Canada, not clarification of its enduring strengths and weaknesses. Sound bite journalism—electronic and print, featuring snippets of contradictory claims—has obscured the fact that Canada, although recently suffering from recession, has managed to satisfy most of its citizens in ways we should marvel at and learn from rather than dismiss. □

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Scalpel, Please

Start cutting away at the salaries and the numbers of specialists out there, or whatever health care system we have will cost too much

by Christopher Georges

"Everyone told me it was the wrong thing to do," recalls Dr. Jennifer Weyler, explaining her decision two years ago as a medical student to become a family doctor. "My teachers discouraged me; administrators discouraged me. They told me I was too smart to go into primary care or that the job wouldn't be enough of a challenge." And sure enough, Weyler, now a resident in family medicine at the University of Massachusetts School of Medicine, is frustrated—but not by her job, which she loves. "It frustrates me," she explains, "to have to continually explain to people what a primary care practitioner is."

It was only 50 years ago, after all, that no one had to be told what a family doctor was, mainly because that's about all there was. Eighty-seven percent of all doctors in the thirties were general practitioners—namely internists, pediatricians, and family doctors. Today that figure has dropped to 30 percent.

That might appear, at first glance, like good news: As researchers become more sophisticated about what causes diseases and how to treat them, we need physicians who can focus on complex subfields of medicine. As medical technology evolves from stethoscopes to x-rays to CAT scans, we need doctors who can make the most of high-tech advances.

But it's also true that, despite the media's obsession with heart-warming stories about ice-packed kidneys air-lifted across America, the vast majority of medical treatments require little more than a visit to a generalist, where a check up, a prescription, or some simple medical advice will do the trick. More than three-fourths of all symptoms for which people seek treatment, studies show, can be fully treated by primary care doctors.

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Problem is, the vast majority of doctors, namely specialists, aren't trained—or willing—to provide this kind of all-important treatment. All of which means that as Americans line up outside the neurologist's or radiologist's office to get their specialized care, we are wasting, according to one recent study, hundreds of millions of dollars annually on unnecessary procedures and other services prescribed by test-happy specialists. At the same time, the quality of care is dropping as preventive care—which is underprescribed by many specialists—takes a back seat.

Specialized tastes

While these problems have dogged our medical system for years, the real trauma of the primary care shortage is yet to come. Unless we act immediately to double the percentage of family doctors in America, any of the vaunted attempts to repair our system is doomed to fail. That's because—as everyone from Hillary to the AARP has agreed—the keys to repairing health care are eliminating waste, creating better "management" of health care resources, and beefing up emphasis on preventive care through HMOs and cooperative systems. To do this, they say, the point people must be generalists who would handle most cases on their own and curb expensive treatments.

But as things now stand, we haven't nearly enough generalists to make such a system work. One recent study showed that universal coverage would increase primary care office visits by 64 million a year—requiring 9,000 additional primary care doctors. And if the current rate of decline in medical school students interested in becoming primary care doctors continues, the percentage of generalists will drop from its current 30 percent to under 28 percent by 2010. Instead of a more efficient system, we'll end up with longer lines at emergency rooms, clinics, HMOs, and doctors' offices. This is sure to undermine not only our health, but our faith in the system (not to mention the Clinton administration). Regardless of which kind of health care system we end up with, failing to remedy the shortage of primary care doctors, *and fast*, will cost us enormous sums and may even serve to *lower* the quality of care Americans receive. The government, medical schools, and the entire medical community must act swiftly to undo the present morass.

How thick is that morass? Consider, for example, that the number of gastroenterologists grew by more than 1,000 percent from 1965 to 1990; cardiologists by 900 percent; neurologists by 325 percent; and plastic surgeons by 300 percent. In the same period, the number of primary care physicians grew by just 66 percent.

Specialists, unlike primary care doctors, are prone to order costly, unneeded tests: A New England Medical Center's Health Institute study in 1992 found that specialists order more tests, perform more procedures, and hospitalize patients more often than primary care doctors treating similar symptoms. Family practitioners are less likely to hospitalize patients than specialists treating patients who had similar levels of illness, according to a recent *Journal of the American Medical Association* report. A 1990 study estimated that a 50-50 mix of primary care doctors to specialists would produce a 39 percent reduction in total expenditures for physician services. "Primary care protects people from unwanted procedures," explains Fitzhugh Mullan, an assistant U.S. surgeon general. "General practitioners look at risks and benefits, both in terms of care and costs."

This medical mess has been a long time in the making. In the decades following World War II, the federal government—in an effort to apply the same crush-the-enemy spirit it adopted in defeating the Axis—began funnelling huge sums of money into basic medical research, increasing federal spending on research from about $45 million in 1940 to more than $16 billion in 1987. This reflected the attitude that if we threw enough money at any *specific* problem (as opposed to focussing on preventive or general medicine), such as heart disease or kidney failure, we'd cure it. More specialized researchers, suddenly well funded, came through with more and more specialized procedures and equipment, which in turn fueled the need for specialized physicians. As a result, great gains have been made, but it's also true that as medicine became Balkanized, primary care became health care's unwanted sibling.

These days, while the federal government pours about $10 billion annually into biomedical

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research, primary care research receives a paltry $100 million. And while Medicare—the federal government's largest research funding program—doles out $5.5 billion to residency programs in hospitals and medical schools, virtually all of it goes toward training and support of specialists.

This bias has, predictably, snowballed at many medical schools. Administrators soon realized that the more specialized programs they developed, and the more students and faculty concentrating in sub-areas, the more federal dollars they could pull in. Because medical schools rely on federal grants for more than 20 percent of their revenues, going after such funding has become a top priority. As the money has come in, bigger, more expensive buildings have been built, and more departments have been created, each with their own faculties, staffs, and bureaucracies. The name of the game has become not just medicine, but survival and prestige. As in any large bureaucracy, competition has grown fierce among each of the sub-specialities to recruit more students and faculty.

While medical students have been pawns in this game, it's also true that just about every incentive pushes them towards careers as specialists. You have to have your head buried deep in *Gray's Anatomy* not to notice that the superstar faculty—those earning the largest salaries, running the biggest labs, giving the big-shot lectures—are specialists. Add to that the pressure placed on students by specialist faculty who no doubt want to perpetuate their own fields, and so push their brightest students to follow in their footsteps. For those students who do want to pursue family medicine, programs with big money and large commitments are rare.

All of which help explain why more than 30 percent of students entering medical school indicate a preference for primary care, but only about half of these end up choosing it. At Boston University's medical school, for example, the number of medical graduates entering residencies in internal medicine or family practice fell by 20 percent from 1986 to 1992. At Yale, which once had one of the larger contingents going for primary care medicine, just 31 percent of the grads went for residency in primary care last year. Nationwide, that figure was 15 percent.

For those 15 percent who do stick with it, there is—once they graduate—a relative lack of money and prestige. Primary care physicians earn, on average, 50 to 60 percent less than specialists. The median for, say, an anesthesiologist or surgeon is $200,000. (Family doctors aren't exactly in the poorhouse. Median income is $93,000.) Considering that most med school students find themselves $50,000 in the hole the day they graduate, it's no wonder they feel they have little choice but to move into a high-paying sub-field.

While generalists' salaries are at the low end of the medical scale, the jobs are, in many ways, the most challenging. The amount of material primary care students must master is 20 times greater than it was 50 years ago, and they are expected to know about more areas than specialists. Their patients are generally the most difficult to deal with, such as those with chronic or degenerative disorders. Moreover, Medicare provides no reimbursement for check ups, and in 22 states, Medicaid also refuses to pay. And primary physicians have to deal with all of the insurance paperwork hassles for less money.

Internal debt

For all the negatives, many primary care physicians say that the substance of the field is quite satisfying. That should come as no surprise considering the rewards it brings: developing long-term relationships with patients, the challenge of solving a range of problems, etc. Sculpting noses is also important, but it is not hard to understand why many specialists—despite the fact that they're hauling in the big bucks—can lose interest in their jobs.

But the way the system now works, non-medical issues loom so large that they cannot simply be put aside. "I entered internal medicine because I found it diverse, dynamic, a real challenge," explained one young El Paso doctor who recently quit serving as an internist to specialize in nuclear medicine. "But it was costly, especially having four children. My [loan] repayment comes to a total of $144,000. Plain and simple, I couldn't afford to stay in. Nuclear medicine isn't exactly what I wanted, but since it offered a lucrative pathway, I took it."

Thus, the key to ending the shortage is to eliminate many of the negatives that weigh

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down primary care. Reform could bring the ratio of generalists to specialists to 50-50 by focusing on change in two key areas:

➤***Eliminate medical school bias against primary care.***

If this means using the heavy hand of government regulation, so be it. Since most medical schools, long aware of the primary care shortage, have done little to alter their curriculum to encourage students to move into primary care (and instead have continued to lobby fiercely for federal specialization research funds), it's time the federal government mandates that schools provide students with experiences in primary care, such as required clerkships in either family medicine or primary care in the third year.

Med schools will, no doubt, battle to retain control over their curriculums, but there is little question that exposing students to primary care medicine early on works. Fewer than half of the nation's medical schools offer family medicine as a mandatory part of the curriculum, but those that do send more than twice the number of graduates into general practice than schools that don't.

Just to make sure medical schools get the message loud and clear, the federal government can ensure this requirement sticks by using the leverage provided by the $5.5 billion Medicare doles out each year in medical training and research grants. Senator Jay Rockefeller, who has led the drive in Congress to increase the number of primary care doctors, recently unveiled a plan that would cut off government money from any medical teaching facility that does not train an equal number of primary care doctors and specialists.

➤***Increase compensation for primary care doctors and offer more loan forgiveness for those who agree to serve as generalists.***

Both Rockefeller and the Clinton administration have been pushing to beef up funding for the National Health Service Corps, a program that offers scholarships to medical school students, physicians, assistants, and nurse practitioners who agree to practice in medically-underserved (mostly rural and inner city) areas. (There are now only about 1,500 physicians in the program, down from more than 8,000 before it was cut back by Reagan and Bush.)

But solving the crisis now will require even bolder steps. Here's one immediately workable measure that would give young or even middle-aged doctors the incentive to transfer to general practice: forgive a portion of medical school debt for each year a physician remains in primary care practice. If a doctor at some point leaves primary care, the remaining debt would not be forgiven. For example, if a doctor had a debt of $75,000, and $5,000 was forgiven for each year he practiced primary care, the entire loan would be forgiven after 15 years. If the physician decided to leave primary care after 10 years, he would owe the lender $25,000. This of course would mean spending tens of millions of federal dollars, but it's also true that this investment would, in a very short time, be repaid through savings in timely preventive care. More importantly, loan forgiveness works: According to one recent study, 41 percent of internal medicine residents said that debt had influenced their training or career decisions. And the money that we'd save from having fewer specialists could immediately help pay for universal coverage.

Solving the other half of the money problem—making primary care practice lucrative enough to allow it to compete with high-paying fields like surgery—will require both government and private sector action. The most obvious route is aggressively equalizing primary care salaries—it won't be enough to raise generalists' salaries; the specialists' must come down. Some HMOs have taken tentative steps in that direction. In desperate need of family care doctors, they are now offering generalists bonuses and salaries double those of five years ago. (One southwest HMO pays its GPs $100,000 more than it pays some of its specialists.)

Medicare should follow this lead. Reimbursement rates for generalists are still relatively much lower than those for specialists. The government should not only raise reimbursement rates for check-ups and other primary care services, but offer payments for more preventive services, such as cancer screening and smoking cessation programs (which, remarkably, aren't covered now). Because private insurers often follow Medicare in setting their payment rates, the ripple effect will spill over into the private sector.

Most important, however, is that whatever change does occur comes quickly, since the administration is closing in on health care reform. If we have any hope of reversing this trend within the next five years, steps should be on the agenda now. □

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MEMO OF THE MONTH

The Under Secretary of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

December 3, 1992

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIAL OFFICERS

SUBJECT: NE/NE-60 Concurrence

Recently, memoranda have been prepared for my signature or directed to departmental offices from other departmental offices which contain statements regarding whether the direction contained in the memorandum is applicable to Naval Reactors (NE-60). Several memoranda have been incorrect in their assumption regarding the effects on NE-60, resulting in unnecessary further correspondence to correct the misunderstanding.

Applicability to NE-60 of a contemplated action is not always obvious. In many cases, the impact is either indirect or the direct impact is not appreciated due to lack of understanding of the scope of NE-60 responsibility. To avoid misunderstandings in the future, you are requested to consult NE regarding applicability statements before they are made and before memoranda are presented to me, the Secretary, or Deputy Secretary for signature.

I appreciate your attention to this matter.

Hugo Romrehn

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Medicareless

The nation's largest insurer of the elderly could add a few benefits and save a few billion

by Daniel Franklin

It's time for a health care quiz.

If you were in charge of the largest health insurer of the nation's elderly would you:

A) Pay enormous charges for unnecessary and avoidable procedures and hospital stays, thereby incurring one of the largest drags on the nation's deficit, or

B) Fund proven, less expensive options that can prevent extended illnesses, thereby reducing the cost to senior citizens and taxpayers?

If you picked B, don't quit your day job.

But if you picked A, congratulations, you may have a career waiting for you in the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), the organization that administers Medicare.

And that's the problem, for as HCFA and Congress grope for ways to reduce costs in the Medicare system, they see only the simplest and, ironically, the most harmful cures. Congress thinks only in terms of reducing benefits or trimming physician reimbursement rates. The seriousness of the health care crisis, they say, justifies the austerity of these measures. But times of emergency require more than mere draconian budget cutting; they require creativity.

Preventing serious illness—instead of waiting until expensive treatments are necessary—or offering alternatives to unnecessary procedures and hospitalizations can actually save HCFA money. It's a paradox that both politicians and the elderly can learn to love: By *adding* benefits, you can increase the health of America's senior citizens while slowing the meteoric rise of the Medicare budget.

➤*Increase funding of home health care.*

"People are almost always happier in the home, and we would like to keep them there," says Joanne Schwartzberg, director of geriatric health at the American Medical Association. "We just haven't figured out a way to do that yet." The obstacle, however, isn't a lack of medical knowledge; the obstacle is HCFA. Although patients are more comfortable at home, and home health care is

Daniel Franklin is an intern at The Washington Monthly.

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overwhelmingly cheaper than equivalent hospital care, Medicare's coverage encourages patients to stay in hospitals. The health benefits alone should be enough to encourage HCFA to increase its home care coverage, but since it is not, consider some of the economic advantages:

- According to a study by Lewin/ICF, a patient recuperating from a hip fracture at home incurs $2,300 less in medical costs than one who stayed in a hospital. These savings, multiplied by the approximately 250,000 hip fractures per year, could put Medicare's savings into the hundreds of millions.
- The same study found a $520 per case savings for victims of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. At nearly 95,000 cases per year, that comes to an additional $48 million savings.
- By treating catastrophic accident victims at home, an Aetna Life & Casualty study found, Medicare could realize $78,000 per case savings.

Approximately one-third of all home care costs come out of recipients' pockets, so it raises an eyebrow when Medicare says it pays "for all medically necessary home health services." Although there is an overall cost benefit for choosing home health care, the out-of-pocket costs for home patients actually can be hundreds more than hospital care. The heaviest burden, predictably, falls on those with the lowest incomes who cannot afford supplementary insurance.

In spite of the overall savings, Medicare refuses to pay for things in the home—like special meals—that it pays inflated rates for in a hospital. As a result, patients face the following dilemma: receive care at home at added cost and burden to themselves and their family, or stay in the hospital and have everything but the deductible paid for by Medicare.

Fortunately, much of the apparatus for funding home health care is already in place. The interpretation of what constitutes "medically necessary" services, however, must be greatly relaxed. For instance, while Medicare will pay for wheelchairs and adjustable beds, it won't pay for the device that enables a patient to move from one to the other because that, in this screwy logic, is a "convenience item." Medicare will reimburse for primary dressings, such as gauze, but not for secondary dressings, such as the medical tape to hold that gauze in place. Says Schwartzberg: "This is the strange, Alice-in-Wonderland sort of world [Medicare] is in."

There is yet another obstacle to patients receiving care at home: Doctors don't feel it's in their interest to prescribe home care. And why should they? Many of the services doctors provide to home patients, such as phone consultations, aren't paid for, and those that are invariably are under-reimbursed. In spite of recent increases in reimbursement rates, a physician still receives an average $50 for a house call. It costs $90 to get a plumber to come fix your toilet. For doctors, the question is just as simple as for patients: Either prescribe home care, which provides little reimbursement for services, or keep patients in a hospital, where everything is paid for at a higher rate.

So simply by increasing reimbursement rates, and loosening regulations on what equipment and services are considered "medically necessary," HCFA could redirect the flow away from hospitals and toward the home, saving itself billions of dollars.

➤Implement a home visit program for all Medicare beneficiaries over the age of 75, including those who are healthy.

Geriatricians at the UCLA School of Medicine conducted a test of over 400 Medicare beneficiaries over the age of 75. Every three months, a geriatric nurse visited the participants' homes, most of whom were active and relatively healthy, and took a comprehensive health survey. The nurse conducted a physical examination, a home-safety evaluation, and made sure prescribed care and medicine were taken properly. The nurse corrected any dangerous practices, advised the elderly on nutrition and exercise, and reported potential problems to the patient's physician. The cost of the visits was less than $500 per year.

And worth every penny. After the very first year, patients receiving the care were marked-

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ly healthier than an untreated control group. The study found that while the patients were not less likely to be admitted to a hospital, the length of stay was reduced from an average 12.2 to 9.6 days. Considering that an average day in the hospital costs around $1,000, that comes to almost $3,000 saved in hospitalization alone. Furthermore, someone receiving the service was five times less likely to check into a nursing home. The reason for the success: The nurse's visits helped the patient and the physician tailor the care to the patient's health problems. The number of visits to the doctor was not significantly reduced; however, patients made fewer unnecessary trips, and the ones they made actually improved their health.

For HCFA to include these benefits in the Medicare package would require an about-face not seen since the program started in 1965. In HCFA's defense, there was less to prevent back then. Most people simply didn't live long past 65. But currently, someone who reaches 65 can expect to live another 15 to 20 years. And research has shown that even the simplest preventive care, such as exercise, can have a tangible effect on the well-being of people as old as 90.

Research notwithstanding, HCFA may still reject adding preventive care measures. "For HCFA to add these services, we would have to demonstrate in the short-term that preventive services are cost-effective," says Dr. Donald Patrick, who designed HCFA's preventive care research test at the University of North Carolina. The problem is that many will produce their most significant benefits later than Congress is willing to wait.

What HCFA may do is suggest doctors perform some of the services the nurses provided, only in their offices instead of at home. Doctors could talk about benefits of proper nutrition, exercise, and taking prescribed drugs just as well or better than a nurse, the logic goes. This would do minimal good, however, according to Dr. Andrea Steiner, evaluative coordinator for the UCLA project. "We found that the most valuable component was the nurse visits. Being in the person's home and seeing how they lived was far more valuable than any answer the person could give in a doctor's office."

This direction would be a radical departure from the normal Medicare program, though such programs are becoming increasingly common. In July, Mutual of Omaha announced it had agreed to reimburse heart patients participating in preventive care programs, and Blue Cross/Blue Shield is expected to follow. In addition, Canada, Germany, and Australia all sponsor some form of preventive care. In the meantime Medicare is letting 1965's medical knowledge dictate the care for 1993's elderly.

➤Extend coverage of prescribed Medicine to senior citizens below the poverty line.

How's this for logic: Medicare will pay $40,000 for the expenses of a heart attack, but it won't pay the $1,200 for the medicine that would have prevented it. Nor will it pay for the $1,000 drug treatment that prevents $25,000 ulcer surgery, or the $1,300 in drug therapy that would make $8,400 in hospitalization for chemotherapy-induced anemia unnecessary.

Get the idea?

Medicare has never covered prescription drugs. But since the mid-sixties, researchers have discovered medicines that can help prevent major health problems or take the place of surgery once such problems occur. "One day in the hospital is $1,000," says Dr. Bruce Garret, a Washington D.C. kidney specialist. "That's a lot of pills. Medicine is what keeps people out of the hospital." Not only does it keep people out, it shortens their stay if they must be hospitalized. Canada, for instance, covers prescription drugs in its national health plan, and as a result, hospital stays are on average shorter than in the United States.

The most important thing to know about medicine is that it doesn't work if you don't take it. As obvious as this sounds, many elderly do not take their full prescriptions because they simply can't afford to. Senior citizens are the group in the country least likely to have coverage for their prescription medicine (only 36 percent). At the same time, they are far and away the most frequent users. A person under treatment for more than one condition can pay as much as $300 per month for medicine. So there are two options: Either don't take the medicine and wait for the inevitable complication to take

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you to a hospital, or take only a partial dose, cross your fingers, and hope that it's sufficient. Either will likely land you in a hospital, but that's okay, because Medicare covers hospitalization, including any drugs prescribed while you are there.

Drug money

What makes Medicare's drug restrictions more nonsensical is that drugs, while still overpriced, have increased in cost at just over half the rate of health care in general. So what is HCFA's problem? HCFA worries that if it insured prescriptions, there would be nothing to keep doctors from wildly prescribing medicine without any concern about the cost. Considering that American doctors are not renowned for restraint, HCFA could have a point. So here is a compromise: extend Medicare coverage to the most vulnerable recipients. A proposed health reform bill sponsored by Representatives Richard Gephardt (D-MO) and Pete Stark (D-CA) would guarantee drug coverage to all elderly below the poverty line. Since the chief savings would come from those who would not be able to afford their full prescription otherwise, Medicare should adopt this Gephardt-Stark proposal and make certain that these people have full access to prescriptions. It is one of the few times that the morally and financially right choices coincide.

In many respects, Medicare is doing an excellent job. It's one of the most efficient health insurance providers in the country. About 2 percent of Medicare's total budget is spent on administrative costs, versus 10 percent for Blue Cross/Blue Shield and over 15 percent for Mutual of Omaha.

But for the past quarter century, Medicare has been working on the Boy Scout principle: When an old lady gets to the street corner, help her across, and then let her go on her way. Today, however, there are too many street corners and too many old ladies to make this work. If Medicare is to succeed, it must realize that it is far more rewarding, and in many cases less costly, to ensure that the old lady can cross each street by herself. □

The Washington Monthly

JOURNALISM AWARD

FOR MAY 1993 IS PRESENTED TO

Richard B. Schmitt
The Wall Street Journal

Wonder what's wrong with the American legal system? According to this colorful account of the many trials of Patricia McColm, a former San Francisco soap-opera actress and self-described "citizen litigant," excessive lawsuits rank high on the problem chart. In the last 15 years, Schmitt recounts, Ms. McColm has pursued 30 lawsuits: "She alleges more than a dozen personal injuries, resulting from assaults, batteries, defamation and false imprisonment, among other wrongs." She claims to have fallen in two department stores, been injured by a door at a Bank of America branch, and had her foot run over by a grocery cart.

Schmitt suggests that Ms. McColm, who has prevailed in about half her cases, is an example of "the tendency of many thousands of Americans to file questionable suits in hopes of inducing defendants, usually insurers, to settle for less than the cost of litigation." All of her insurance cases drive up everybody's costs; in just one case against the state of California, she cost taxpayers $132,824. She's a flamboyant reason, the piece makes clear, that we desperately need tort reform in the courts.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to the best newspaper, magazine, television, or radio story (or series of stories) on our political system. Nominations for any newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station in the country are welcome. The subject can be government in its federal, state, or municipal manifestation. Please send nominations to Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. Two copies of the article or broadcast text should accompany the nomination.

Nominations for stories published or aired in August will close September 15. The winner will be announced in the December issue.

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TIDBITS & OUTRAGES

PICKY, PICKY
The New York Times recently ran the following correction: "An article on March 8 about the investigation of the bombing of the World Trade Center omitted a word in quoting Rabbi Avi Weiss, the national president of the Coalition for Jewish Concerns, at a demonstration outside the Al-Salaam mosque in Jersey City. He said, 'I am *not* here to condemn this place and this mosque.'"

THEY'RE GOING AFTER VIEWERS WHO DON'T KNOW ABOUT ARNOLD'S ACTING
Columbia Pictures placed advertisements for the Arnold Schwarzenegger movie *The Last Action Hero* on the main fuselage, the booster rockets, and the payload of a NASA Conestoga rocket.

TAKING ON THE TOUGH ISSUES
Washington D.C.'s *City Paper* reports that the head of that city's department of finance and revenue, Sharon Morrow, has issued instructions forbidding employees from wearing red high-heeled shoes to work, from using their feet to flush office toilets, from drinking coffee at their desks from cups without lids, and from including sentences in official correspondence to the effect that "If you desire any further information, please call me."

THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN THEY DID *NOT* COMPARE BUST SIZES
A *New York Times* article about the first meeting of a woman and the daughter she gave up for adoption at birth 23 years ago stated that "the two women exchanged photographs and memories, compared bust sizes and changed each other's lives."

"R.J., THE MONSIGNOR OKAYED THE WHOLE LINE—HE ESPECIALLY LOVED THE BEAVIS AND BUTTHEAD AND PONTIFF VIDEO GAME"
In order to raise money during John Paul II's recent trip to the United States, the Roman Catholic Church officially authorized the merchandising of Pope products. Items bearing his likeness endorsed for sale at such outlets as Wal-Mart and Sears during the visit included T-shirts, posters, and fanny packs.

—Scott Shuger

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Ambushed

The biting memoirs of a former Bush speechwriter offer insight into why presidencies fail

by James Fallows

Hell of a Ride: Backstage at the White House Follies, 1989-1993
John Podhoretz, *Simon and Schuster, $21*

This is a terrific book, which almost anyone interested in politics will enjoy reading. It clarifies aspects of the Bush years that had seemed to be inexplicable quirks, and it provides hilarious new illustrations for timeless truths of political and governmental life.

Structurally, John Podhoretz's book might seem to be a successor to *What I Saw at the Revolution*, Peggy Noonan's memoir of her years as a speechwriter for Ronald Reagan and George Bush. Podhoretz served briefly as a Reagan speechwriter, during that administration's last few months, and for the first few months of the Bush regime he worked in the office of "Drug Czar" William Bennett. (By the way: now that Kristine M. Gebbie has become head of the government's anti-AIDS efforts, can we either drop titles like "AIDS Czar" or change them to "Czarina" as appropriate?) Like Noonan, Podhoretz throws out occasional right-wing chestnuts to show that he really does believe in the "empowerment" agenda, a strong national defense, cuts in the capital-gains tax, and so on.

But the emotional tone of this book is completely different from Noonan's, in a way that makes it more delicious reading and that also illustrates differences between Reagan and Bush as politicians. Noonan's book had a sentimentality about Reagan—the man, the symbol, the leader of a movement. While reading it I was reminded constantly of World War II movies, in which stoic GIs and brassy dames back home would go all teary-eyed when they thought about the Big Causes that little people like them were fighting to defend. The emotional model for Noonan's book was, in short, *Casablanca*. Seemingly tough guys, who were idealistic deep down inside, pulled together to beat an evil foe.

Perhaps this tone reflected the way the world really looked to Reagan loyalists during the 1980s. Podhoretz hints time and again in this book that it would have been great to be part of a crusading administration like Reagan's, rather than that of a conservator, like George Bush. (Although Podhoretz doesn't say this, anyone who has ever written speeches envies those who wrote for Reagan, a man whose long training as a professional announcer taught him, first, that delivery mattered and, second, that it was not shameful to stick to a text.) Perhaps Noonan's soft-focus rendition of those in power reflected either a conscious or an instinctive trait of her own personality. For instance, she presented George Bush as being so completely selfless and other-oriented, so Gary Cooper-like in his modesty, that he could barely bring himself to use the word "I." This trait, she said, accounted for the odd subjectless syntax of Bush's acceptance

James Fallows, a contributing editor of The Washington Monthly, *is Washington editor of* The Atlantic Monthly.

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speech at the 1988 convention ("moved to Texas, raised a family," and so on).

Podhoretz presents Bush, more hard-headedly and much more convincingly, as being just the opposite sort of person: a man so completely absorbed in his own drama of success, failure, and popularity that he could barely notice anything else. The Bush years, Podhoretz says, should be thought of as a "solipsistic presidency," guided not by any positive agenda but by the president's concern about how to position himself on each new issue that turned up in his in-box. Podhoretz says:

> Comedian-impressionist Dana Carvey of *Saturday Night Live* captured Bush's self-obsession perfectly when he picked up on Bush's incessant use of the word "prudent," lampooning it in the oft-invoked phrase "It wouldn't be prudent at this juncture." . . . Someone who is obsessed with "prudence" is less concerned about what is going on around him than about his response to the activity and how it will be perceived.

As these few lines might suggest, Podhoretz has not exactly sugar-coated his portrayal of Bush. Indeed, the book has barely a good word to say about Bush's presidency, except of course for the successful coordination of the war against Saddam Hussein. Strictly as a matter of human relations, the utter lack of warmth in this depiction of his party's leader is startling. Exasperated as Democrats were with Jimmy Carter during his administration's long collapse, most of them retained some little trace of fondness for what Carter had tried to do or what he could have become. Podhoretz's nostalgia is all used up on Reagan. In fairness, Podhoretz was not some long-time ally of Bush who spurned him at the last moment. He says he came to Washington in the 1980s to be part of the conservative moment, rather than to plump for the election of George Bush. In any case his stony attitude toward Bush, whatever it says or doesn't say about Podhoretz as a person, frees him to take a black-comedy approach to the administration's foibles.

Politically, this book makes a stronger case against Bush's re-election than did all the speeches by all Democrats in 1992. Podhoretz uses the famous-in-Washington story of the "empty box" as one illustration that the administration had completely run out of gas. In June of 1992, as Bill Clinton was wrapping up the Democratic nomination, Bush's speechwriters met with Robert Teeter, the campaign manager. Teeter showed them a chart he had worked up on the computer to coordinate the themes for the campaign. The first box, on the left-hand edge of the chart, listed some of Bush's accomplishments in office. The second box listed the problems America had to deal with at home. Other boxes on the right listed specific Bush administration proposals and the main argument for them. "But it was the third box," Podhoretz says:

> at the center of the chart, the box from which all the other boxes flowed, that was the subject of the meeting.
> It read:
> **Theme/Slogan/Name**
> There was nothing else in the third box.
> "What I want from you," Teeter told the speechwriters, "is to help me fill this empty box."

The book contains dozens of similar examples, all elaborating the idea that Bush felt entitled to stay in office but could not offer any reason why. "The worst-run campaign in presidential history"—probably an exaggeration, but at the moment I can't think of a counter-example—was "led by a man who believed he deserved a second term because, damn it, he just did, that's all." The only people who felt loyal to Bush, Podhoretz says, were those who were in some anthropological sense like him—the New England preppie crowd that "summered" on the Maine coast and had been "tapped" for Skull and Bones. Because the battle against Bill Clinton was purely personal, turning not on "ideas" but on Clinton's affront to Bush's sense of entitlement, any campaign tactic was acceptable. (Richard Ben Cramer's brilliant book about the 1988 campaign, *What It Takes*, illustrated even more vividly how the gentlemanly Bush could talk himself into gutter campaign tactics.) Bush's father Prescott, as a senator from Connecticut in the 1950s, had expressed patrician disdain for Joe McCarthy's low-life smear techniques. But George Bush found himself trying to gin up concerns about Bill Clinton's student visit to Moscow and anti-war protest in England. The main bit of news in Podhoretz's book shows that

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this was an even riskier and more hypocritical strategy than it seemed at the time.

During the first debate among the presidential candidates last fall, Bush lit into Clinton for helping organize a protest in London in 1969. He said "I just think it's wrong to demonstrate against your country in a foreign land." Podhoretz says that as soon as the words left the president's mouth, a Bush campaign aide named David Tell nearly had a heart attack.

> Tell knew that if the Clinton campaign had a particular clip from a London newspaper, Clinton himself could right now deliver the *coup de grace* that would level the Bush candidacy for good. The clip was a story about the demonstrations dated September 22, 1969, and one of the Americans who spoke critically of his country's role in the Vietnam war was "Michael Boskin, 22, of Stanford University."
>
> Boskin, forty-five, was currently serving as the chairman of Bush's council of Economic Advisors, in a grand office on the third floor of the Old Executive Office Building.

Clinton of course didn't find the clip, Boskin kept his mouth shut, and the protest issue never really took. But the whole campaign, in Podhoretz's view, was the logical culmination of an administration whose leader wanted only to *be* president, not to do anything in particular, and whose subordinates therefore spent most of their time fighting for positions on the greasy pole. While Podhoretz has a few kind things to say about fellow grunt-level staff members, his portrayal of most of the administration's big shots consists of devastating anecdotes about their pomposity, selfishness, and blunders. Those who come off worst, apart from the president himself, are Samuel Skinner (for incompetence), John Sununu (for overall unpleasantness), Boskin (for huffy self-importance), and above all the inimitable Dick Darman.

Podhoretz gives proper emphasis to the most unbelievable act of chutzpah in modern political history: Darman's role in a big *Washington Post* series that came out two months before Election Day, 1992. The series, by Darman's close friend Bob Woodward, was an examination of the Bush administration's economic record, concluding

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—*J. Anthony Lukas, front page,* **New York Times Book Review**

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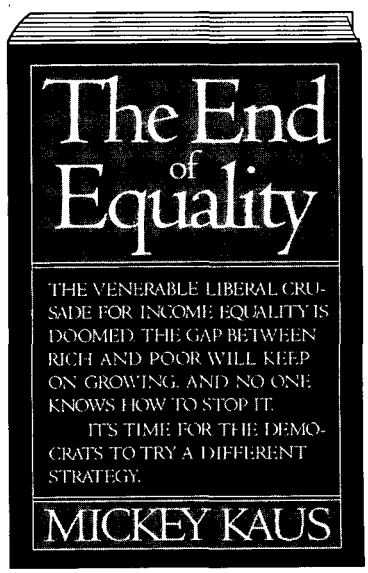

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that the record was disastrous. So far, so good: It was hard even for Bush to claim that the combination of big deficits and lost jobs represented success. The problem with the series was Darman's obvious role as (a) the main source for Woodward's anecdotes, most of which cast the President in a very unfavorable light, and (b) the only hero in this economic tragedy—the lone voice bravely warning the short-sighted, unprincipled president that trouble lay ahead.

Presidential aides routinely try to clean up their records after their administrations have left office, taking credit for the victories and distancing themselves from the defeats. (The generic title for White House insiders' memoirs should be, *If Only They'd Listened to Me.*) Darman's innovation was to start re-writing history while it was still going on, acting as if he, the poor little budget director, had had no responsibility whatsoever for the ballooning federal deficits. As Podhoretz says, "There was simply no precedent in Washington history for a sitting official to work with a hostile journalist on an exposè of his own administration to be published in the middle of a life-and-death reelection drive. . . You did not just want Darman to be fired for his disloyalty; you wanted him to suffer, to be stretched out on a rack for a few hours."

Yet Bush did nothing to Darman, taking at face value his claim that Woodward had "sandbagged" him and reneged on a promise to publish the information only after the election. Sorry for the misunderstanding, Dick! No problem with you calling me an unprincipled hack, as long as it's for a best-selling book next year! "It had to be true, then," Podhoretz concludes. "Darman had the president hypnotized."

There are countless anecdotes like this one. Nearly all ring true to the way the Bush administration looked from the outside, and to the way the White House always looks to anyone who has worked there. Podhoretz offers a number of nice details about the vanities and vulnerabilities of those who temporarily hold political power. One of my favorites concerns the endless status battle between people with offices in the West Wing of the White House and those working in the vast, adjacent Old Executive Office Building, or OEOB. West Wing offices are cramped, uncomfortable, low-ceilinged, and generally terrible; the OEOB has hallways and office suites that look as if they were designed for a race of giants. But everyone in the West Wing views the OEOB as the other side of the tracks, since the president's own Oval Office is also in the West Wing. This is an old story, but Podhoretz has a new touch. Rather than walk the dreaded 20 yards that separate the two buildings, secretaries in the West Wing would send faxes when they needed to communicate with the wretches in the OEOB. There is much, much more in this vein. *Hell of a Ride* is a realistic if mordant view of what things can be like when the campaign is over.

Podhoretz's explicit message is that the Bush administration lacked the strengths of Reagan's—the ideological clarity, the sense of mission starting at the top. The main message I took from it is how much Bush shared with the previous one-term president, Jimmy Carter. One reason the Bush administration accomplished so little except fighting Saddam Hussein, Podhoretz says, is that no one within the administration could predict exactly where the president would come down on a particular issue. During the Reagan years, you generally knew without asking where the president stood. He was for most military programs, against most taxes, and so on as we all knew. But under Bush, Podhoretz says, most issues had to be fought out from scratch, since in the end the president might go either way. Bush might have decided that the Rio environmental conference was an anti-American extravaganza, to be ridiculed and boycotted, as Reagan would have—or decided to go, as he finally did. Bush might have stonewalled on the 1990 budget agreement because of his promise not to raise taxes—or given in, as he did. As a result, the Bush team spent more of its time fighting internally, and less getting its plans passed, than Reagan's team did.

The Carter administration had a problem similar to Bush's, although for a different reason. Carter loved studying the details of programs, and judging each on its independent merits. Bush apparently didn't care that much about domestic programs and so could be pushed either way. The cautionary lesson for the Clinton team should be obvious. It is good that their leader cares more about facts and details than Ronald Reagan did. But he must also take care that a few big, simple goals remain clear, to the public and to his employees as well. □

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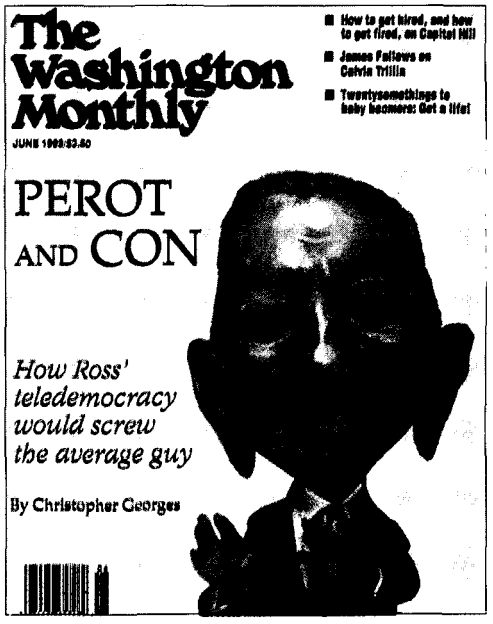

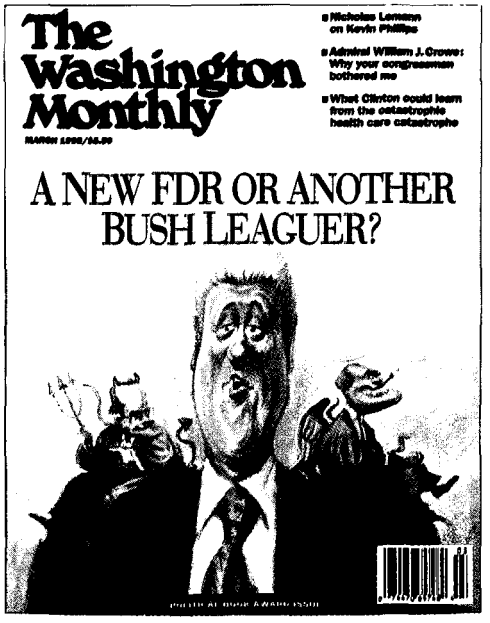

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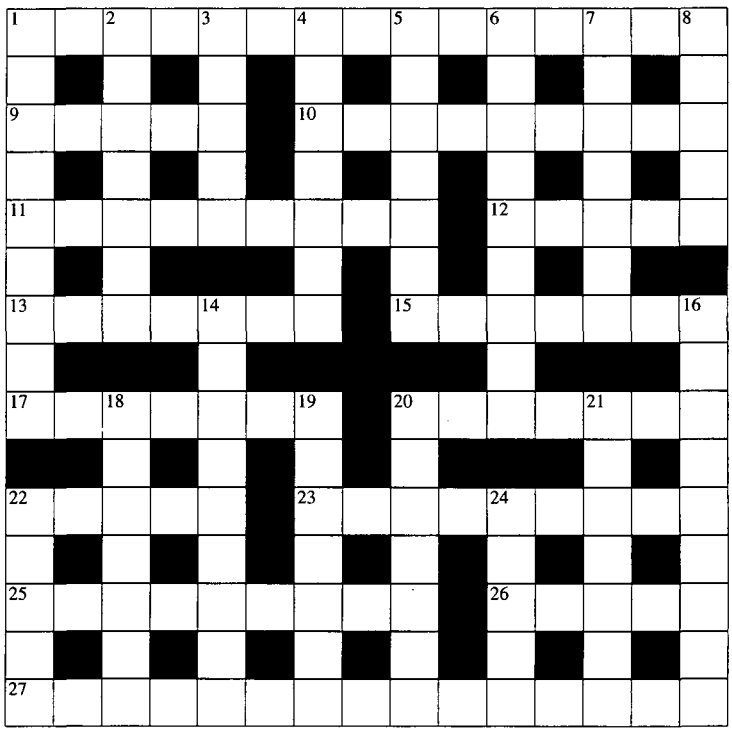
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.



ACROSS

1. Young doctor confused real court site for fiscal function. (8,7)
9. Does old household chore for kings. (5)
10. Eat tuna, if diced, to instill desire. (9)
11. Disturbed senior met man licking stamps. (9)
12. Mediterranean destination seen first in this American luxury yacht. (5)
13. Busy editor consumed an egg, scrambled. (7)
15. Mixture of salt and sun for leaders. (7)
17. It's heavy metal, humor it somehow. (7)
20. Silence shattered for freedom. (7)
22. These may be good in bed. (5)
23. Depict spy artfully as morose. (9)
25. Island enlarged, stirred with Nitrogen. (9)
26. Heir arranged icons. (5)
27. Treaty angle Nero negotiated for top official. (8,7)

DOWN

1. Successful politician is arbitrarily nice and numb before tea. (9)
2. Revolution made nut grin. (7)
3. Button made from trees. (5)
4. Dealing set straight. (7)
5. Makes changes about English grades? (7)
6. Showing caustic nature lit victor in a peculiar way. (9)
7. Tossed a rag in a river. (7)
8. Opponent celebrated in Pliocene mythology. (5)
14. After close of meeting auditor becomes reflector. (9)
16. Casual Zen production for noted short cut. (4,5)
18. Each in public to pass consumption limits. (7)
19. Being next in line when I'm gone is to bring parties around. (7)
20. Dotty dots in record for classified ad. (4,3)
21. Strange attire after middle of month looks better. (7)
22. Letter from abroad for retreating soldier's mother. (5)
24. East end of large deli for German city. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:

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Drug Bust

The modest success of one DEA sting suggests that with the agency's present tactics, it can't win the war on drugs

by John Rothchild

Swordfish: A True Story of Ambition, Savagery, and Betrayal
David McClintick, *Pantheon Books, $25*

To the surprise of the publishers who paid a $1 million advance for it, this long-awaited bombshell of a book, eight years in the making, has been a dud at the sales counter. *Indecent Exposure*, McClintick's earlier exposé of wheeler-dealers in the movie industry, caused a great fuss that put Hollywood on the momentary defensive. This time around, he exposes the bumblers in the Drug Enforcement Agency, but nobody seems to care.

Even in Miami, the national capital of smuggling where *Swordfish* is set, the book appeared on the best-seller list for only two or three weeks. The titillation of McClintick's naming names—crooked lawyers, money-laundering bankers, inept DEA officials engrossed in petty disputes, several of whom still live in the area—has not been enough to draw people into local bookstores. All of this is a shame. Ignore the unconvincing policy prescriptions at the end of this book and you've got a terrifically engrossing tale with a cast of characters Hollywood would be hard-pressed to imagine.

Swordfish is devoted to a single DEA sting: Operation Swordfish. (In South Florida, narcotics cases and sports franchises are both named after marine life.) What makes this a gripping story is that McClintick infiltrates the feds as well as the bad guys and gives details that you're amazed he could have discovered. Many of these come to him through tape recorders and hidden microphones that are the stock in trade of narcotics agents. When agents aren't wiretapping their suspects, they are taping their own conversations with co-workers, informants, and their bosses at the DEA. Since nobody in this business seems to trust anybody else, people are bugging each other constantly. So when McClintick reconstructs a dialogue, it's verbatim.

Between the Colombian drug kingpins and their U.S. representatives, the informants and their aliases, the long list of government bureaucrats assigned to the case and their overlapping jurisdictions, this is a complicated adventure. Other equally complicated adventures involving international crimes, banks, and government bureaucrats—the BCCI scandal, for example—have produced books in which it's impossible to keep track of who is doing what to whom, so the reader loses interest. In *Swordfish*, this doesn't happen, because McClintick can tell a story, as opposed to simply hanging the quotes around the facts and calling the result a narrative.

Swordfish begins in the early eighties, when certain factions in U.S. drug enforcement have begun to realize that busting a boatload of cocaine, and then a bigger load of cocaine, and so on, is not the same thing as stopping cocaine traffic; in fact, the bigger busts are a sure sign that more and more drugs are getting through. The only effective way to stop the flow, these factions argue, is to attack the major suppliers through their banks and their laundering operations. By confiscating the profits from drugs, the theory goes, the government can put suppliers out of business.

After much bureaucratic ping-pong, the Miami DEA gets the OK from Washington to experiment

John Rothchild is a contributing editor of The Washington Monthly. *He is the author of* Up for Grabs, *a book about speculators and con men in Florida.*

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with this new approach. It sets up a phony investment company, Dean International, which offers banking services to the cocaine trade. As it turns out, the government is no more adept at running a phony investment company than it is at running the Post Office. Nobody seems to be in charge. There are squabbles among the DEA agents, squabbles between the agents and their bosses, squabbles with Washington, and more squabbles with the FBI, which is worried that the DEA's Operation Swordfish will undermine its own similar Operation Greenback, or that the DEA will hog the limelight if both operations succeed.

Moreover, the DEA in Miami is top-heavy with gringos, and this is a Latin American town. Nobody in the agency can play the role of Latin banker, which is what Dean Investments needs before it can gain any credibility with the smuggling crowd. To ensnare anyone at all, the DEA relies on informants, mostly local dealers who are happy to throw the agency an occasional small-timer in return for being allowed to stay in business themselves.

Snow business

Enter Robert Darias, a middle-aged Cuban exile who walks unannounced through the DEA's front door and becomes the hero of *Swordfish.* Like many of his fellow exiles, Darias fought at the Bay of Pigs. He was captured and locked in a Cuban jail, then released in President Kennedy's famous ransom deal and returned to Miami. Darias makes some profitable real estate investments, but his relaxed, tropical attitude toward certain gringo rituals—like tax-paying—gets him in trouble. Soon, he finds himself in a U.S. jail on tax evasion charges. Darias the ex-con, nearly destitute and still owing back taxes to the IRS, offers his services to the DEA as a sort of freelance infiltrator.

Darias is the perfect banker for Dean Investments: glib, charming, and Latin. In the vacuum of competence at the local DEA, his role quickly expands until he's more or less running the entire show. This alternately thrills and horrifies his superiors, who on the one hand are delighted when Darias gets big-time traffickers to launder money through Dean, and on the other are horrified that their top-secret project is controlled by a walk-on with a felony record.

It isn't long before Darias connects with the second most appealing character in the book, Marlene Navarro, a woman with the allure of Mata Hari and the competence of a Harvard MBA. She is director of U.S. operations for a major narcotics syndicate and its flamboyant kingpin, Carlos Jader Alvarez, whom the DEA describes as the "godfather of the Colombian Mafia." This claim may be exaggerated; every time a Colombian is arrested, he turns out to be the "godfather of the Colombian Mafia," but that Jader is a big-time trafficker nobody would dispute.

Darias, posing as banker, struggles to keep his incompetent gringo handlers from screwing up his performance with Marlene Navarro. They want to come along on his visits, in part because they don't trust Darias, and in part because they've heard Navarro is a knockout. Darias manages to hold them off as he works to win Navarro's trust. She invites him into her condo, where Darias notices the porno movies in her video library and the photograph of Navarro sitting barebreasted on a horse. One of the subplots of *Swordfish* is whether Darias, a married man, will end up in Navarro's bed.

Eventually, Navarro gives Darias a few briefcases full of Carlos Jader's drug money—mostly $20 and $100 bills—to be laundered. This involves exchanging all the bills for a Dean International cashier's check, which is sent to Colombia and turned into pesos, which in turn are deposited in Jader's accounts. Meanwhile, Darias has attracted other customers who want their bills laundered, so the cash is piling up in desk drawers and filing cabinets at the Dean headquarters, millions of dollars that nobody is bothering to inventory.

Wiretaps are installed on Navarro's telephones to augment the tapes that Darias has been making all along, and the DEA prepares to move in with indictments and arrests of Navarro and several of her associates. The drama peaks when Navarro is worried she's been betrayed, and Darias is desperate to know whether she thinks he's the rat. There's an easy way for him to find out—the DEA is still tapping Navarro's phones. He asks his bosses what Navarro has been saying, but they won't tell him because the rules of wiretapping preclude a potential witness in a case from hearing the wiretap evidence in advance. Navarro is spooked into fleeing the U.S. for South America, and Darias and his fam-

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ily receive death threats and go into hiding in north Miami. Operation Swordfish begins to look like a fool's errand that has accomplished nothing.

So the end of the book is a surprise: As a result of Operation Swordfish, Navarro is captured in Venezuela and extradited to the U.S. There, she is tried and convicted and serves six years in prison until 1992, when she is granted a new trial. Carlos Jader is captured by the Colombian police and also extradited to the U.S., where he is tried, convicted, and continues to serve his prison term. Several lesser characters are jailed as well.

Instead of letting a good reporting job speak for itself, McClintick steps out of his reporter's role in the epilogue to give his opinion that drugs such as cocaine should not be legalized, that operations such as Swordfish should be continued, and that the war against drugs can be won. But wittingly or not, McClintick has proven the opposite. Even with Jader and Navarro put away, you leave *Swordfish* convinced that the DEA is no match for private enterprise, and that busting a drug lord or two is hardly going to stop the flow of cocaine out of Colombia.

In fact, what has changed during the eight years that McClintick worked on this book is that the turf wars between rival drug factions have been resolved, so now business runs smoothly, professionally, and boringly, like AT&T. "No doubt about it. The Colombian cartel operates like a major corporation," says *Miami Herald* reporter Jeff Leen, the resident expert on the subject. "The money is laundered in offshore banks, away from federal oversight, and operations have been decentralized away from Miami, so you don't hear as much about it as you used to. But it's still a big business, and very successful."

In fact, the manufacturers and suppliers of illegal drugs, crack in particular, have been far more successful than the pharmaceutical companies at making a product that's readily available, affordable, and shrewdly promoted. The cocaine trade is a triumph of modern capitalism that ought to be studied in business schools. Perhaps that's why McClintick's book hasn't struck a chord. His approach is out of date. A book about the Colombian cartel modeled after Tom Peters's *In Pursuit of Excellence* would be more to the point. □

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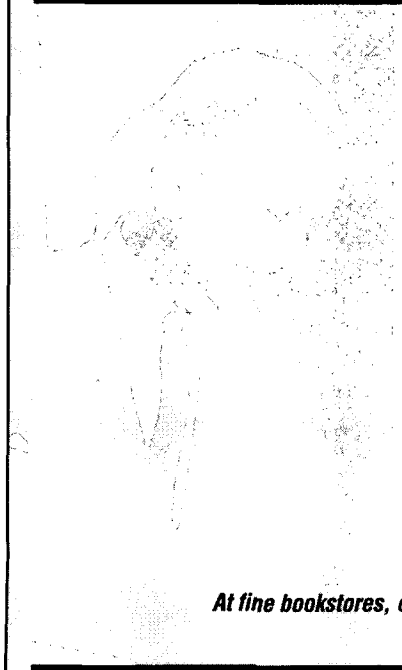

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Post Impressions

A spicy, bare-knuckled account of life at The Washington Post *savages the newspaper rightly in some places, unfairly in others*

by Mark Feldstein

Volunteer Slavery: My Authentic Negro Experience
Jill Nelson, *The Noble Press, $21.95*

Like so many other aspiring college journalists in the seventies, I was inspired to become an investigative reporter by the Watergate heroics of *The Washington Post*. Ten years later, I moved to the capital and was surprised to discover that the same newspaper which bravely felled a crooked president seemed afraid even to criticize the cocaine-riddled corruption of the city's mayor, Marion S. Barry, Jr.

What was going on? The *Post*'s coverage of the Barry administration—indeed, of black Washington generally—seemed to vacillate between the obligatory and the enfeebled. Not that I minded, really. I was one of the paper's television rivals, and its neglect only made it that much easier to break local stories. Still, the question nagged: Why had one of the best papers in the country fallen down so badly in its own backyard?

In this autobiographical essay, Jill Nelson offers the most pointed critique yet on racism at *The Washington Post*. Nelson, an African-American reporter who worked at the paper for four years, delights the reader with a memoir that's raw, acerbic and hilarious; she happily picks at the scabs of race and sex and class that most writers prefer to leave untouched. For Nelson, payback is a bitch, and she pays back—and bitches back—with a vengeance, settling some nasty scores with the establishment organ that seduced her from freelance writing in New York and then abandoned her in the back-stabbing nation's capital.

Nelson gets her licks in good. Ben Bradlee turns out to be "a short, gray, wrinkled gnome." Bradlee utters such inspiring lines as "I want the fashions [section] to be exciting, new, to portray women who dress with style, like my wife." Publisher Don Graham is "a rich kid waiting for his mother to let go of the reins." Other *Posties* are uncharitably described as "weasel-like" and "mottled, plump, sour-lipped."

But ultimately, Nelson's book is more than just an angry middle finger extended to her former colleagues. It is also a poignant tale of being black and female in a white and male corporate world—"voluntary slavery," she calls it. "I envy the arrogance," she writes of the *Post*, "their inherent belief in the efficacy of whatever they're doing, the smugness that comes from years of simply being caucasian and, for the really fortunate, having a penis."

A soul sister who revels in the racy, Nelson describes exploits like having sex with a mortician on his embalming table ("I would have burst out laughing, but he had such a pathetic look on his face that I know if I did he'd get mad and might not be able to get it up") and the joys of male bimbos ("Whenever he did or said something stupid, I'd think about what a pure ego feed it always was to look up into his handsome face when he fucked me"). Nelson's philosophy about the opposite sex is a simple one: "One thing I love about men and pussy is that it makes them so predictable."

Mark Feldstein is a correspondent in Washington for CNN's Special Assignment investigative unit. From 1984 to 1990, he covered the Barry administration as a reporter for WUSA, a CBS affiliate.

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Still, it's race, not sex, that fuels this autobiography. Throughout it all, Nelson is forever in search of her own "authentic Negro experience," forever at war between her own pride in being black and her self-criticism for not being black enough. She writes movingly of her own particular family pathos—a brother on crack, a sister permanently disabled by a drug overdose—and struggles with her own guilt at being a member of the black *bourgeoisie*.

But Nelson's argument falls short when it comes to explaining the sticky issue of race at the *The Washington Post*. To Nelson, it's simply racism, of white-bread owners and editors who just don't get it. Take the paper's metro staff. Nelson calls it "the newspaper equivalent of Coon Town, where Negroes are happier among their own (you see, it's not segregation, they *like* it that way)." When Marion Barry was arrested, Nelson writes, the "newsroom was damn near giddy. Most of my colleagues walked around grinning at one another, clotted in small groups, whispering and smirking. When Negroes passed by, they would grow silent, voices lowered . . . White Boys 1, Black Boys 0."

When it came time for Barry's trial, Nelson complained that she was the only African-American assigned to cover it—"The colored writer writing 'color' pieces," as she puts it. As for the white editor in charge, she "squeal[ed] . . . damn near salivating" as other, white reporters recapped the juicy court testimony about Barry, whom she says the *Post* viewed as "this powerful, arrogant, crack smokin' Negro."

But Nelson's focus on Barry-bashing at the *Post* begs the question: If the paper was so racist, why did it go so easy on Barry for so long? Nelson doesn't really try to answer this question; instead, much of what she writes is an apologia for the coke-tooting mayor. Nelson claims Barry was only "allegedly" smoking crack on the infamous FBI videotape; that a woman who testified that Barry forced her to have sex had it coming; that the *Post* was "part of a *de facto* conspiracy on the part of the U.S. Attorney . . . to 'get' Marion Barry." But she does grudgingly acknowledge this: "Overweight, greasy, usually dripping with sweat, Barry speaks English like it's his second language."

Outside of that, nowhere does Nelson confront the enormity of Barry's crimes—how he steered city contracts to his drug suppliers and then corrupted the upper ranks of the city's police department to keep them from busting him. Nowhere does Nelson explore what it meant for inner city kids to watch their role model turn out to be a drug addict, or what scars Barry's racially polarizing demagoguery left on the city. And nowhere does Nelson acknowledge the sorry failure of Washington's black establishment—District councilmen, mayoral aides, *Post* editors, and local TV reporters, many of whom knew of Barry's drug use but looked the other way—to take a stand against Barry.

One notable exception was *Post* writer Juan Williams, whose most scathing indictments of Barry were published—tellingly—not in the *Post*, but in *The New Republic* and *The Washington Monthly*. Yet Nelson unfairly dismisses Williams as "a neoconservative opportunist à la Clarence Thomas . . . the perfect Negro, at least in the eyes of white folks, because most of the time he writes—and apparently believes—what caucasians think black folks should feel and think."

Unfair. Williams may have other faults, but he was one of the few reporters who wrote what so many said privately—that Barry was a tinhorn dictator, a corrupt, self-aggrandizing ruler who would have been ridden out of town long ago had he been white. But it just wasn't politically acceptable to say so, at least at *The Washington Post*.

This is not a conspiracy of well-turned-out Ku Kluxers, as Nelson seems to believe, but a knee-jerk color consciousness that makes it ideologically unacceptable to criticize anything black, even when you're black. The paper's real crime was that for far too long it really didn't care enough about Barry or the people he represented. In many ways, this well-meaning paternalism is more insidious than the racism of a Bull Connor, because at its core is the notion that African-Americans can't be expected to choose someone better than a Marion Barry—and because the real victims of a demagogue like Barry are the poor and powerless he claims to champion.

In the end, it's not clear whether Nelson comes to realize any of this. She has a nervous breakdown, quits the *Post*, and returns to freelancing in New York—a loss for Washington and for the paper, both of which desperately need original voices like hers. □

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Theodore W

Since The Making of the President, *it'*

by Walter Shapir

Mad As Hell: Revolt at the Bal
Jack W. Germond and Jules Witcover,

As I think back on it now, reading Theodore White's *The Making of the President, 1960* at the impressionable age of 14 probably changed my life. Coming from a family of last-gasp Stevenson Democrats, I was transfixed not so much by the saga of Kennedy triumphant as by the small, lovingly etched portraits of thwarted dreams—a forlorn folk singer crooning a ballad for Hubert Humphrey on the eve of the West Virginia primary, the packed galleries at the Los Angeles convention in hopeless thrall with Adlai. Other young would-be writers fantasized about running off to Paris to emulate Hemingway and Fitzgerald, but romance for me could be found here at home, chronicling the pageantry of a presidential campaign.

How hollow that dream feels 30 years later. Political reporting, my chosen trade, has become a burnt-out genre, as derivative as medieval Scholastics trying to ape the rhetoric of Cicero. The literary flowering that followed White sadly lasted little more than a decade; the 1968 and 1972 elections alone produced *The Selling of the President*, *The Boys on the Bus*, and the gonzo posturing of Hunter Thompson. But since then, the void. Only Richard Ben Cramer's *What It Takes*, his landmark character study of six 1988 presidential contenders, rises from the muck to redeem White's legacy. With the publishing industry now convinced that campaign narratives don't sell, the once-proud genre has been winnowed down to the quadrennial now-it-can-be-

Walter Shapiro, a contributing editor of The Washington Monthly, *is* Esquire's *White House correspondent.*

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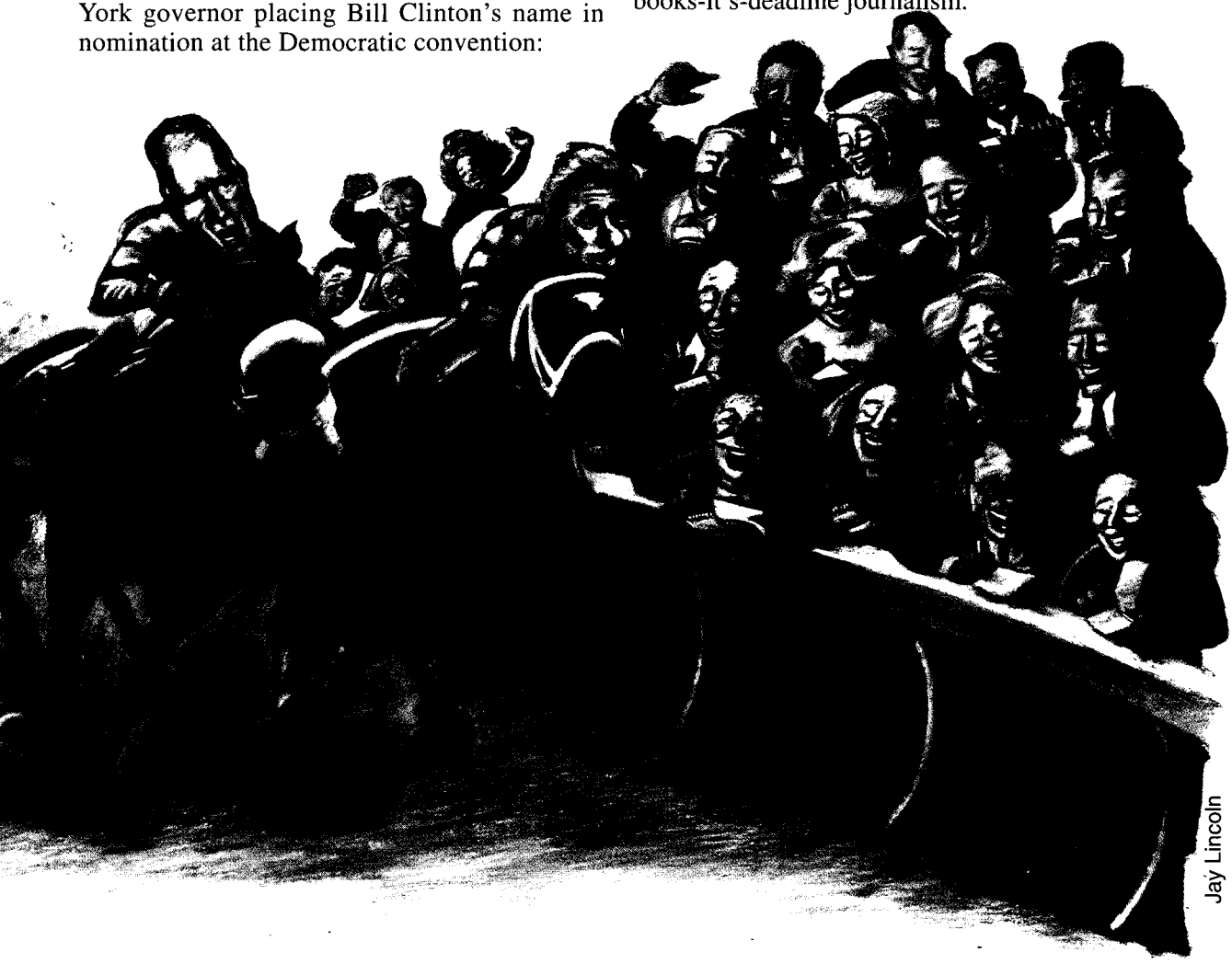
What Germond and Witcover offer instead is politics seen at a middle distance viewed exclusively through the prism of the strategists, the operatives, and the pollsters. A typical passage argues, "What Perot could not or would not grasp was that it was essential for his campaign to control the message that went out," but the authors fail to grasp that 20 years of this kind of political message control spawned the voter cynicism that made Ross Perot's candidacy possible.

Germond and Witcover's idea of an exclusive tidbit is Democratic National Chairman (and now Commerce Secretary) Ron Brown's riveting reconstruction of his phone conversation with Mario Cuomo that led to the New York governor placing Bill Clinton's name in nomination at the Democratic convention:

Cuomo: How long is that speech supposed to be?
Brown: As long as you want it to be, Mario.
Cuomo: You really want me to do this, don't you?
Brown: Yes, I really want you to do it.
Cuomo: Clinton really wants me?
Brown: Yeah, Clinton really wants you to do this.
Cuomo: I think I have been much more persuasive on this issue, but I'm going to defer to your judgment.

That's it. There is no punchline, no kicker, no hidden payoff—just standard, empty-your-notebooks-it's-deadline journalism.


Jay Lincoln

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What comes across as particularly one-dimensional is their inside analysis of the Clinton campaign in *Mad As Hell*. Having covered Clinton myself for *Time* magazine, I will concede that my standards may be unduly demanding and perhaps a little self-serving. It's not that Germond and Witcover are unfair or inaccurate but that their narrative seems woefully incomplete. What's missing, for example, is the bitter battle within the campaign after the California primary that led to the elevation of James Carville and the fabled War Room, as well as the *de facto* demotion of campaign chairman, Germond and Witcover source, and now Trade Representative Mickey Kantor. The authors' disinterest in substance blinds them to the intense internal policy debate that led to the publication of the *Putting People First* economic plan in June. They also fail to grasp the significance of keeping the campaign headquartered in Little Rock and largely outside the sway of the Beltway political establishment. Most flagrantly, Germond and Witcover gloss over the strategic importance of Hillary Rodham Clinton as the disciplined insider who forced her ever-reluctant husband to make difficult, but necessary, decisions on the structure of the campaign.

As for the poetry and drama of Clinton's last, sleep-defying 72-hour-campaign marathon, Germond and Witcover distill it down to this evocative sentence: "The final day was a blur, as both Bush and Clinton raced frenetically by jet around the country."

This last point underlines where Germond and Witcover probably went astray: They were generationally ill-equipped to cover the Clinton campaign. Nothing in their life experience prepared them for the first campaign in American history in which women were as much the key players as men. Based on the list of sources in the "Acknowledgements" section, it seems clear that the only women in the Clinton campaign they ever interviewed were media consultant Mandy Grunwald and press secretary Dee Dee Myers. Without talking with scheduler Susan Thomases or research director Betsey Wright, let alone anyone close to Hillary, it was easy to get a distorted view of what actually was going on in Little Rock. Not traveling much with the candidate after the early primaries for understandable financial and logistical reasons, Germond and Witcover also never managed to sit down with such key sources as Clinton confidant Bruce Lindsey and issues director Bruce Reed.

And as for the poetry and drama of Clinton's last, sleep-defying 72-hour-campaign marathon, Germond and Witcover distill it down to this evocative sentence: "The final day was a blur, as both Bush and Clinton raced frenetically by jet around the country."

To be fair, there are several strong chapters amid the dross in *Mad As Hell*. I was amused to discover, for example, that none of Bush's handlers grasped the divisive potential of Pat Buchanan's fire-and-brimstone "religious war" speech on the opening night of the Republican National Convention. "I read the speech, and it had a great endorsement [of Bush]," recalled Bush adviser Jim Lake, who had previewed the text. "I really paid no attention to anything else."

Germond and Witcover also provide the fullest account that I have read anywhere of the days leading up to Perot's precipitous withdrawal from the race in July, perhaps the single event that vaulted Bill Clinton into the Oval Office. Most of the other versions tell the story from the self-serving perspective of turncoat Republican consultant Ed Rollins. Calling on ties that date back to the Carter White House, Germond and Witcover counterbalance the Rollins bias with a revealing interview with Hamilton Jordan, who also was advising Perot. According to Jordan, Perot told him this in early July: "It probably was a mistake to hire you guys. The difference between you and Rollins is, I like you. I don't like Rollins and don't trust him. He's got the Washington disease. He talks to the media too much. This is just another business deal for him." A few more lines like that, and I could almost muster a little sympathy for the Texas billionaire who spoke to some of the best and worst aspects of the American character.

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In the end, *Mad As Hell* is one of those vaguely useful reference books that you can plop on the shelf in case you someday need to conjure up the Buchanan campaign in New Hampshire. What intrigues me far more is wondering what a reporter like Teddy White in his prime could have done with a presidential campaign as rich, complex, and mysterious (Perot again) as 1992. White, to be sure, could be seduced by top politicians ranging from Jack Kennedy to, sadly, the Richard Nixon of 1972. But all reporters (save, of course, the saintly Janet Malcolm) are to some extent prisoners of their sources, and this occupational hazard should not minimize White's lasting contribution to political literature. So it is alas easy to tick off the reasons why a true reprise of *The Making of the President* series seems impossible: the prohibitive travel costs; the difficulty of winning access; the omnipresence of self-serving "spin"; the self-consciousness and self-importance of the handlers; the bloodless, technocratic nature of modern politics; the competition from newspapers and newsmagazines; the lowly status of print in a video age; and the well-earned cynicism of voters and readers about the political process itself.

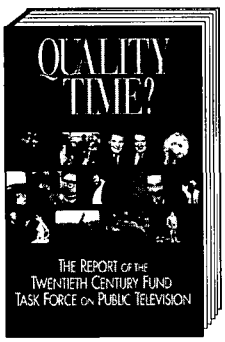
But all that aside, I still feel a yearning to strip off the veil of presidential politics, to use the campaign as a metaphor to get at something deeper and more evocative about America, about idealism, about ambition, about character, about the media, and about the meaning of democracy itself. Sure, there is something addictive about the mindless adrenaline rush of covering a campaign, the fraternity (and sorority) of the press bus, the late-night drinks in some hotel bar, the ability to step outside your life and sign on with the closest thing that America has to a traveling circus. I recall and appreciate Clinton strategist Paul Begala's election eve crack, "Politics is show business for ugly people." But if three years from now, fate finds me trudging off one more time to Iowa and New Hampshire, I hope that I will be impelled by reasons that transcend habit, boredom with civilian life, and a craving for the limelight. Instead, I hope that I will be motivated by the quest to rediscover what it felt like to read *The Making of the President, 1960* at age 14. □

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND

QUALITY TIME?

THE REPORT OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND TASK FORCE ON PUBLIC TELEVISION

With background paper by Richard Somerset-Ward
Published by The Twentieth Century Fund Press



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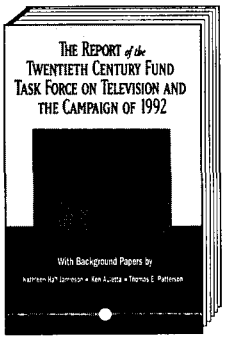

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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

A City Year: On the Streets and in the Neighborhoods with Twelve Young Community Service Volunteers
Suzanne Goldsmith
The New Press, $22.95

By Daniel H. Pink

National service, once a flaky idea peddled only by *The Washington Monthly* and a few cranky neoliberals, has hit the big time.

Bill Clinton says national service will be a defining idea of his presidency. He has promised to usher in a "season of service," and has created a White House Office of National Service to turn that promise into a reality.

Into this congenial climate comes Suzanne Goldsmith's firsthand account of nine months with City Year, the highly regarded Boston-based project that's a prototype for the national service programs Clinton envisions. The brainchild of Alan Khazei and Michael Brown, whose Harvard law degrees did not quash their entrepreneurial instincts, City Year is a privately funded service corps in which young people work in small teams on projects like building playgrounds, restoring housing, tutoring children, or assisting the elderly. City Year participants earn $100 per week, and if they stay an entire nine months, they receive $5,000 for college or job training. To write her book, Goldsmith labored alongside a City Year team and talked at length with its members.

She began her City Year on a team that demonstrated one of the program's greatest strengths: diversity. (At the risk of being labeled a bean counter, I note that her team had six women, six men, two Latinos, four African-Americans, two Asian-Americans, three middle-class whites, a few college students, and a man on probation.) The crew was officially known as the Reebok Team, after the Massachusetts footwear company which supplied part of the uniform all City Year corps members must wear.

The Reebok Team's first projects were worthwhile. Team members excavated a weed-choked garden and playground complex in a beleaguered south Boston neighborhood, repainted a playground in Roxbury, and did chores for the elderly in a Charlestown public housing project. Then it was on to a state hospital to repair a greenhouse.

But difficulties quickly arise. Most tragically, one corps member is shot and killed one night as he walks home. And while some corps members hurl themselves into their work, others do little but complain loudly. Absenteeism and lateness are chronic. Several corps members often disappear for the afternoon or spend work days chatting on the phone.

What makes the shirking and skipping hard to understand is that the Reebok Team doesn't work that much anyway.

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For example, one of the group's projects was to organize a Community Clean-Up Day in the Boston neighborhood of Chelsea. But during this seven-week venture, the Reebok Team found itself, alas, with loads of "downtime." Not to worry, though.

"There is a benefit to this downtime," Goldsmith writes. "It gives us a chance to relax together and get used to one another as friends rather than teammates. Thursday afternoons have been set aside for social activities—the team calls it 'Team Bonding day.' We go bowling. We go boating on Jamaica Pond. One Thursday we go together at lunchtime to Faneuil Hall, a popular open-air market, and the women on the team spend an hour browsing together at a lingerie store." Goldsmith adds, "Team members are rarely absent on team bonding days."

No wonder. It sounds like a hoot, but it doesn't sound much like national service. Also troubling is the amount of work time devoted to show. Each morning, City Year teams participate in group calisthenics at a major Boston subway stop, an exercise that seems geared less to physical fitness and more to public relations. One week goes to rehearsing a "recruitment blitz," complete with rap songs and skits, for the next year's program.

At times in this account, City Year seems more like an advertisement for national service than national service itself. At other times, the only real advertisement I could think of violated the jurisdictional boundaries of sneaker marketing. I often wanted to shout, "Reebok Team, just do it." Every Friday, for instance, is "Enrichment Day"; instead of digging or tutoring, corps members attend workshops and take field trips. In January, as at many private Eastern colleges, the Reebok Team has an "intercession," which is soon followed by a five-day "midyear retreat" at Camp Grotonwood.

These activities raise fundamental concerns about the book and about City Year itself. Goldsmith shines her attention almost entirely on the participants. She appears more concerned with what the corps member are getting out of the program than what they're accomplishing in the communities that are supposedly being served.

Her epilogue, written two years after her City Year ends, is especially revealing. We learn that Reebok team- mates, Amy and Jackie, are in college, that Richie has been arrested, and that Brendan believes City Year improved his self-image. But the 30-page section doesn't say anything about the condition of the places where the team worked. Has the Chelsea Clean-Up Day been repeated? Have the kids at the Blackstone School become better readers because of City Year tutoring? Have drugs and gangs returned to the playground and garden the Reebok Team cleaned?

We don't know; Goldsmith doesn't tell us. The result is a cloudy view of service because true service is about doing a job, solving a problem, improving a life. Its primary focus is the served, not the servers.

Clinton has himself fallen into this trap. In a March speech on national service, he mentioned Stephen Spalos, a 23-year-old City Year team leader. "Last year, when I visited his project," Clinton said, "he literally took his sweatshirt off his back and gave it back to me so that I would never forget the kids at City Year. And I still wear it when I go jogging, always remembering what they're doing in Boston to help those kids."

Unlike John Kennedy, his political hero, Clinton begins with the wrong question. We must ask not what national service can do for its participants, but what its participants can do for their neighbors and neighborhoods.

True, many Reebok Team members come from troubled backgrounds. We learn that about half the team drops out. Charles returns to jail. Richie essentially drinks himself out of the program, and then is accused of burglarizing one of his teammates. Several team members sell drugs.

But if the overriding goal of enlisting volunteers in national service programs like City Year is to rescue troubled *volunteers*, then we are being foolhardy. Many of these kids come to the program with nearly two decades of pain and heartache that a single year—not even a City Year—can erase.

And that is precisely why we need national service. Our country has a screaming set of needs that neither the private sector nor the government is meeting—dangerous streets, abominable public schools, inadequate health care. Conditions like these produce kids with troubles. Yet the solution to their troubles is not a nine-month stint in City Year but a focused assault on the conditions themselves.

City Year is a good program, and its creators and participants ought to be commended for their innovation and pluck. And as long as the programs are open to criticism and evaluation, problems like the ones Goldsmith sometimes inadvertently points out can be solved.

If we go that route and focus on the volunteers *and* on the substance of their work, Clinton's "season of service" might achieve its most spectacular result. It might be followed by a season of solutions.

Daniel H. Pink is a Washington writer.

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